

# District Health Department #10

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## MEDIA RELEASE

Date: October 20, 2009

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### Flu-Like Illnesses Increasing – Vaccine Not Widely Available

The Health Department is receiving reports of increased school absences due to flu-like illness. These illnesses are part of an expected trend playing out across the state as people begin paying more attention to chills, fever, sniffles, body aches, and other symptoms that may signal influenza.

“It is clear that the flu is starting to touch our area”, said Linda VanGills, Health Officer for District Health Department #10. “And it’s very likely that the vast majority of these flu cases are due to H1N1.”

H1N1 flu (formerly called swine flu) first emerged last spring and continued to cause infection throughout the summer. According to the latest report from CDC, more than 99 percent of the flu identified in labs nationally in the past few weeks has been H1N1. “H1N1 never really went away and is now increasing as schools are back in session and more people are indoors in close quarters with one another,” said VanGills.

“Influenza spreads quite easily from person to person through coughing and sneezing,” said Dr James Wilson, Health Department Medical Director. “A specific lab test must be done to prove it’s H1N1, but knowing the type of flu really doesn’t change the treatment. If someone is sick with classic flu symptoms, chances are it’s H1N1.”

Simple precautions can help prevent spread of the flu. Stay home when you’re sick, unless you are severely ill. Most people recover from the flu without needing medical treatment. Stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without using medicines. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your upper sleeve when you sneeze or cough. Wash your hands often with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand gel.

“If you’re pregnant, under age 5, have a chronic health condition, or have difficulty breathing, you should definitely seek medical care. But if you go in and you don’t have the flu, you could catch it from people who do have it. And if you go in with just mild illness, you can still spread it to people who may have a hard time fighting off any infection.”

Vaccination is the single best way to prevent the flu. However, H1N1 was identified too late to be included in this year’s seasonal flu shot. Production and testing of a new H1N1 vaccine has been completed, but vaccine is not yet available in large quantities.

“The first batches of vaccine have begun to arrive and we will be receiving more and more each week. We need to focus first on those individuals who are at highest risk for serious illness from H1N1 based on patterns of illness these past few months, or who may spread it to people at high risk,” said VanGills.

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“The target groups have been set by the CDC and include pregnant women, children, contacts of young infants, chronically ill people, and health care workers. We wish we had enough vaccine right now for every resident of our area. We expect to eventually have enough, and when we do we will offer it to everyone who wants it.”

As public clinic dates are scheduled, the Health Department will be sending the information to our local newspaper and radio media partners. Vaccinations will also be provided in some schools, pharmacies, and health care provider offices. As it becomes known, more specific information on vaccine availability will be posted at [www.dhd10.org](http://www.dhd10.org).

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