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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SWINE FLU

Dr. Rahul Gupta, Health Officer for the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department (KCHD), would like to keep the residents of Kanawha County informed of the current developments on swine flu. Swine Influenza A is caused by the H1N1 type of virus. Human cases of swine flu have been identified in the United States and internationally.

While no human cases of the swine flu have been documented in West Virginia, the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department is taking a proactive approach in order to be prepared for a possible outbreak. KCHD staff is working with the West Virginia Department of Health & Human Resources and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to monitor the situation, intensify our surveillance, and alert our health care partners. Since CDC has classified this as a public health emergency, the Health Department wants to keep the public informed. This is a situation of concern, not panic, states Dr. Gupta.

Swine flu is a respiratory disease, common to pigs, caused by type A influenza viruses. While regular outbreaks of this disease occur in pigs, humans normally do not get swine flu. Therefore, the abrupt diagnosis in so many people around the nation and the world is concerning. A newly identified strain of the virus is connected to the recent illnesses. States such as Texas, California, New York, Kansas, and Ohio already have confirmed cases of the virus. It is predicted that more illnesses will be identified as testing of patients with flu symptoms intensifies. Dr. Gupta confirms that so far the cases seen in the United States have been relatively mild and self-limiting. One person that required hospitalization was reported to have

underlying medical conditions. Infections from swine flu can lead to severe illness such as pneumonia, respiratory failure and even death.

Symptoms of swine flu mimic those of seasonal human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Gastrointestinal illnesses (vomiting and diarrhea) have been reported in some people with swine flu. Spread of this swine flu is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads; flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Viruses can live on surfaces and can be transmitted by touching contaminated objects and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. I cannot overstress the importance of proper hand washing, reports Gupta. Infected

people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. In other words, you may start infecting others even before you know that you are sick.

Although a vaccine is not available for the prevention of the swine flu, there are antiviral medications that can be prescribed by a clinician to help fight against the flu, by keeping the viruses from reproducing in your body. These drugs can make your illness milder and may prevent serious flu complications. For these medications to be effective, they should be taken within two days of symptoms. It is also important to understand that like the seasonal flu, swine flu may also cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

Dr. Gupta advises there are everyday actions people can take to stay healthy by using the same precautions as with seasonal flu.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Utilize proper hand washing technique with soap and water as detailed below, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people. Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.
- If you get sick, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Follow these instructions for hand washing with soap and water:
- Wet your hands with warm, running water and apply liquid soap or use clean bar soap. Lather well.
- Rub your hands vigorously together for at least 15 to 20 seconds.

- Scrub all surfaces, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails.
- Rinse well.
- Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel.
- Use a towel to turn off the faucet.

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care:

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Clinicians should consider swine influenza infection in the differential diagnosis of patients with febrile respiratory illness, who have recently traveled to Mexico or to the areas reporting confirmed cases or were in contact with someone with respiratory illness who has traveled to Mexico, or any of the affected counties where there are confirmed cases. Patients who meet these criteria should be tested for swine flu. For further information on testing, clinicians can contact the State or their local health departments.

Dr. Gupta wants to remind people that swine flu viruses are not spread by food. It is safe to eat properly handled and cooked pork products. Further information is available at our website: www.kchdvw.org or www.cdc.gov/swineflu or call us at (304) 348-1088.