

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TOP 10 MYTHS ON H1N1 (SWINE) FLU

Charleston, WV – West Virginia remains one of the six states to report no cases of H1N1. The Kanawha-Charleston Health Department wants to keep everyone informed about the H1N1 virus and its impact on our nation and state. There have been a number of myths circulating regarding the H1N1(Swine Flu) Virus so we will attempt to dispel the top ten myths.

- 1. I can get the H1N1 virus by eating pork, swimming in a public swimming pool or by getting coughed /sneezed at:**
Some viruses can be transmitted through the handling and consuming of animal products, however that is **NOT** the case with the H1N1 flu. It is a respiratory virus that is typically spreading from person to person, through coughing or sneezing, from people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with the flu virus on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Similar to the seasonal flu, people may be contagious from one day before they develop symptoms, up to 7 days after they get sick and perhaps longer for children. However, the H1N1 virus is not spread through water sources or by eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.
- 2. My friends just came back from Mexico so we can't go over to their house:**
People travelling within or entering the United States who are experiencing symptoms consistent with novel H1N1 flu and have traveled to an affected area or have been exposed to someone possibly infected with novel H1N1 flu during the last 7 days, should report their illnesses to their health care provider immediately and inform them of their recent travel. However, if your neighbors do not seem sick, you may be offending them more than protecting yourself so use common sense.
- 3. I should at least call my doctor to get some Tamiflu now just in case I might need it later:**
Oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamvir (Relenza) does not prevent you from getting the flu. There are very limited circumstances in which one would recommend prophylaxis and you have to balance that with the side effects as well as many other factors, like your risk of developing complications from influenza. Antiviral drugs may reduce the symptoms and duration of illness yet most people who have contracted H1N1 flu have recovered without antiviral treatment.
- 4. My seasonal flu vaccination will protect me from this outbreak of swine flu:**
The current seasonal flu vaccine seems to confer **NO** protection towards the H1N1 influenza. While scientists are working towards a vaccine, there are several factors that must be considered prior to recommending mass vaccination for H1N1 flu this fall. However, we must not forget that there are 200,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths from seasonal influenza across the U.S. annually and the seasonal flu vaccine is a fairly effective method to prevent a majority of these.
- 5. If you have flu like symptoms, then you have swine flu:**
Not necessarily. This year, due to the H1N1 flu concerns, more people are visiting their doctors with influenza-like-illness than expected for this time of the year. So, we would expect a higher number of cases being diagnosed with seasonal influenza. However, your clinician should be able to make this assessment and order the appropriate tests as necessary.

- 6. Wearing mask and gloves in public will protect me from getting infected with H1N1 flu:**
The best protection against H1N1 or any virus is hand washing or the use of hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol content. Current scientific data does not support the use of extreme measures like gloves and masks in our community. Regular surgical mask are better than nothing, they only block the large virus carrying droplets; the viruses themselves are much smaller and could easily pass through. Specialty mask such as N-95 or N-99 are better, but still not completely safe. Gloves will only protect you from getting the virus on your hands, not from breathing in the virus or it landing on any other part of your body. In addition, such extreme measures in an area of no known incidences of H1N1 virus only causes fear among others.
- 7. The 1918 Pandemic Flu was caused by a H1N1 flu virus:**
Research has shown that the 1918 virus is the likely ancestor of all 4 of the human and swine H1N1 and H3N2 lineages, as well as the "extinct" H2N2 lineage. The 1918 pandemic was different in degree, but not in kind, from previous and subsequent pandemics. Early scientific analysis suggests that it's not nearly as lethal as the virus that caused the 1918 flu pandemic. The last Swine Flu outbreak occurred in February 1976 in Fort Dix, New Jersey, causing four soldiers to get sick and one death.
- 8. Everyone is at equal risk to contract the virus:**
The high risk groups for novel H1N1 flu are not known at this time, but it's possible that they may be the same as for seasonal influenza. People at higher risk of serious complications from seasonal flu include people age 65 years and older, children younger than 5 years old, pregnant women, people of any age with chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), and people who are immunosuppressed (e.g., taking immunosuppressive medications, infected with HIV). Median age for H1N1 flu is 15 years and almost two-thirds of the confirmed cases in U.S. are under 18.
- 9. I can give my baby the H1N1 virus through breastfeeding:**
There are many ways that breastfeeding and breast milk protect babies' health. Since this is a new virus, we don't know yet about specific protection against it. Mothers pass on protective antibodies to their baby during breastfeeding. Because mothers make antibodies to fight diseases they come in contact with, their milk is custom-made to fight the diseases their babies are exposed to as well. This is really important in young babies when their immune system is still developing. Breastfeeding also helps the baby to develop his own ability to fight off diseases. Therefore, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that you do not stop breastfeeding if you are ill. Ideally babies less than 6 months of age should get their feedings from breast milk. If you are too sick to breastfeed, pump and have someone give the expressed milk to your baby.
- 10. All schools will be closed and trips canceled if a case of H1N1 flu is identified and it is not safe to travel or fly:**
School and child care program closure is not advised for a suspected or confirmed case of novel influenza A (H1N1) and, in general, is not advised unless there is a magnitude of faculty or student absenteeism that interferes with the school or child care program's ability to function. This is the most current and revised recommendation from the CDC. While the CDC has not recommended that people avoid domestic travel, specific guidance on this issue of school trips is lacking. Therefore any travel for school trips should be examined on a case by case basis depending on the destination and the local situation at the destination. KCHD is working with Kanawha County Schools to provide information on local public health guidelines, including any movement restrictions and prevention recommendations at the destination prior to each trip.

For daily updated information, please visit www.kchdvw.org. If you need to speak to someone regarding H1N1 virus call (304) 348-1088. For information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, visit www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu.

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