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INFLUENZA (FLU)

PRECAUTIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

What is the Flu?

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and rarely cause more serious illness and possibly death. The best way to prevent the flu is to get a vaccine every year when available. Most people will recover in 7 days to 2 weeks, but some could have life threatening complications such as pneumonia.

How is it spread?

Flu is spread by ingesting or inhaling air droplets where an infected individual has coughed or sneezed; or by touching a surface contaminated by flu virus particles. The virus is spread quickly among crowded populations in enclosed spaces.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Fever of 100° F or greater with cough and/or sore throat. Other symptoms may include: chills, headache, dry cough, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, tiredness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and loss of appetite.

How long does it last?

Symptoms usually begin in 1-3 days after exposure to the virus and generally last for 2-7 days. A person with the flu is contagious after symptoms start for 3-5 days in adults and up to 7 days in young children.

How can Flu be prevented?

The best prevention is by getting your yearly flu vaccine. In the case of the new "swine" H1N1 flu there is no vaccine currently available so other methods of prevention are even more important. Handwashing, covering your cough and sneeze, staying home when sick, and not sharing items such as cups, glasses and utensils are very important in preventing the spread of the disease.

Surfaces such as toilets, sinks, floors, tables, water fountains or any areas where a sick individual has been should be cleaned with household disinfectants (as directed on the label).

What should I do if my child gets the flu?

- If your child is experiencing flu-like symptoms, you should take them to their physician within 48 hours for evaluation. Anti-viral medications are most effective during this period, so it is important to seek treatment early.
- Keep your child out of school until symptom free for 24-48 hours.
- Ensure that your child drinks plenty of fluids.
- Encourage your child to cough and sneeze into their sleeve or into a tissue, and then wash their hands immediately afterwards.
- Ensure that everyone in your family washes their hands frequently with soap and water for 15-20 seconds each time.

For more information, contact the Santa Rosa County Health Department at 850-983-5200 ext. 105 or 140.