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Public Health Division stepping up surveillance of swine flu in Oregon after CDC confirms cases in California and Texas

Public health officials in Oregon are stepping up surveillance for a new strain of influenza known as swine flu, after cases were confirmed in California, Texas and Mexico.

Here in Oregon, the flu season has been winding down and there have been no known cases of the swine flu. Still, in light of the appearance of this new strain, state Public Health Director Dr. Mel Kohn says that there are three important steps we can all take to make sure the flu doesn't spread:

1. Protect yourself and others by washing your hands often;
2. Cover your mouth with something other than your hand when you cough,
3. If you are sick, go see your doctor but otherwise try not to go out and expose others to your illness.

Illness caused by this new strain of flu has the same symptoms as illness caused by other strains of flu including fever, lethargy, lack of appetite, coughing, runny nose, sore throat, and can include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Dr. Kohn says the Oregon Public Health Department is taking several steps to better understand the infection, such as:

- Requesting that health care providers arrange for testing of patients who have influenza-like illness, particularly if they have recently traveled to Southern California, Texas, or Mexico.

- Working with medical laboratories in Oregon, the Public Health Division is also re-testing samples to determine if any recent flu infections among Oregonians were due to swine flu.
- A group of clinicians working with public health has also been asked to share specimens from people with symptoms that suggest influenza. (See www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/acd/flu/flusurv.shtml for more information.)

“When outbreaks happen it can cause anxiety,” said Kohn. “The antidote for that is good information – and good public health practice. As we get more information about this new strain of flu we will be working with our partners across the country and at the Centers for Disease Control to address this issue.”

Background on swine flu

Swine influenza is a respiratory illness related to seasonal influenza. Swine flu is commonly seen in pigs, although occasionally human infections also occur. The most common route of exposure for humans is through contact with pigs, however none of the ill people are known to have had such contact or link to people who do.

Those who had swine flu in the U.S. thus far have experienced mild illness, and have recovered. US hospitals have not reported an increase in serious respiratory illness. All cases were detected through routine surveillance for seasonal influenza.

Although this new strain of flu is called “swine flu”, you do not have to have physical contact with pigs to get infected, and you do not get swine flu from eating pork or pork products. Regular flu vaccines do not generally protect against swine flu

For more information, you can visit the following CDC website about swine flu infections in people. It will be updated daily:

www.cdc.gov/flu/swine/investigation.htm