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Date: September 29, 2009 at 9:30 am
For Immediate Release

The Otsego County Department of Health, A.O. Fox Memorial Hospital and Bassett Healthcare officials urge local residents to help in response to Novel H1N1 influenza virus.

As influenza like illness continues to spread in Otsego County, medical experts have advice for people experiencing flu-like symptoms who wonder whether they should seek medical care.

“We realize that many people are concerned because of the number of people with influenza like illness in our area,” said Cynthia Moore, Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coordinator. “That’s understandable. It may help to know that for most individuals, novel H1N1 influenza will be no worse than the seasonal flu we are used to.”

“Most people recover from seasonal or novel H1N1 flu without needing medical treatment,” Moore said. In fact, most flu patients who are mildly ill can be cared for best at home.

Moore noted those who are NOT seriously ill should avoid hospital emergency departments, but certainly can contact the New York State toll free hotline number @ 1 800 808 1987 or call their primary care doctor with questions about their illness.

“We’re asking for everyone’s help to make sure that emergency department treatment remains available for people who truly need it,” Alisha Barbera, spokesperson at A.O. Fox Memorial Hospital said. “In addition to caring for people with severe novel H1N1 flu, local hospitals still have to manage their regular patient caseload.”

Ruth Blackman, director of Infection Prevention at Bassett Healthcare, emphasized that, the best prevention is to get vaccinated now against seasonal flu and Novel H1N1 as soon as it becomes available and to follow good hygiene practices. “Those individuals who do have to be very careful are those at high risk for complications.” The high-risk groups include:

- Pregnant Women
- Children under five years of age
- Persons 65 and older
- People with an underlying medical condition, including immunosuppression caused by medicine
- Children and adolescents on long-term aspirin therapy
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities.

“These are the individuals who need to be counseled about the early signs and symptoms of influenza, and advised to immediately contact their health care provider for evaluation and possible early treatment if clinical signs or symptoms develop,” concluded Blackman.

Flu-like illness includes fever, chills, headache, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, tiredness, and sometimes diarrhea or vomiting.

When caring for individuals at home, give them medications such as acetaminophen to help reduce fever, and make sure they get rest and plenty of fluids. Individuals under age 19 should never be given aspirin to reduce pain or fever because it could cause a rare but potentially serious condition called Reye's Syndrome.

Individuals who are sick should stay at home until fever has disappeared for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

Flu patients who become dehydrated require medical intervention. Parents should be aware that children can become dehydrated in a short period of time. Things to be concerned about are dry mouth and tongue, lack of tears, dark circles or sunken eyes, decreased urine output and lethargy (extreme drowsiness or pronounced lack of interest in their surroundings). If these circumstances occur, call your healthcare provider. Get emergency care if your healthcare provider cannot be reached.

Call your doctor right away or get emergency care in the event of severe or worsening illness. In adults, the signs of severe or worsening illness are: rapid breathing, difficulty breathing; pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, bluish skin color, dizziness or confusion, increasing fever or severe persistent vomiting.

In children, the signs of severe or worsening illness include: increased fever, rash, rapid or difficult breathing, bluish skin color, irritability, lack of responsiveness (not waking up or not interacting) and not drinking enough fluids.

If you are caring for a household member at home who is sick with influenza, the most important ways to protect yourself and others who are not sick are to:

- Keep the sick person away from other people as much as possible.
- Remind the sick person to cover their cough, and frequently wash their hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub, especially after coughing and/or sneezing.
- Have everyone in the household clean their hands often, using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Ask your health care provider if household contacts of the sick person -- particularly those contacts who may be pregnant or have chronic health conditions -- should take antiviral medications to prevent the flu.

If you are in a group considered at high risk for complications from influenza, you should attempt to avoid close contact (within 6 feet) with household members who are sick with influenza. If close contact with a sick individual is unavoidable, consider wearing a facemask, if available.

More information on novel H1N1 influenza and taking care of an H1N1 flu patient at home is available at www.nyhealth.gov and www.cdc.gov.