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General questions: Jim Sellers, 503-945-5738

Technical questions: Elaine Smith, R.N., 503-588-5403; June 9 contact, Karen Landers, M.D., 503-373-3787.

Oregon's first confirmed death from novel H1N1 (swine) influenza reported in Marion County

A Marion County woman with confirmed novel H1N1 (swine) influenza died on Sunday.

"We are saddened by this death, and our hearts go out to the family," said Dr. Karen Landers, health officer for Marion County. "It's an unfortunate reminder of the seriousness of flu."

This is the first death of a person with novel H1N1 influenza in Oregon and the 28th in the nation. Strains of seasonal flu affect an estimated one in 10 Oregonians annually, and account for approximately 400 annual Oregon deaths and 36,000 nationwide. As of today, there is no indication that the H1N1 influenza is more dangerous than other strains of flu.

The Marion County woman was hospitalized for eight days prior to her death. She had multiple underlying health conditions, which placed her at high risk for infection and complications.

Marion County Health Department has investigated the case to identify who has been exposed to this case, and to slow further transmission.

As is the case of other flu strains, the number of reported cases of H1N1 influenza is declining. The most recent report from the Oregon Public Health Laboratory showed that 168 cases of H1N1 swine influenza in 13 counties had been confirmed since the beginning of the outbreak. The counties are Clackamas, Clatsop, Columbia, Jackson, Lane, Lincoln, Linn, Marion, Multnomah, Polk, Umatilla, Washington and

Yamhill. The largest numbers of reported cases were in Multnomah and Polk counties, with 50 and 41 cases, respectively. Statewide, the cases ranged in age from infant to 78 years, with an average age of 16.

“While flu activity overall continues to decrease in Oregon, we’re still seeing cases of novel H1N1 circulating in our community,” said Dr. Mel Kohn, public health director in the Oregon Department of Human Services. “Influenza of any kind is serious. People in high-risk groups – infants, pregnant women and people older than 65 – should see their doctor if they experience flu symptoms,” he said.

Public health officials continue to press the need to take the basic precautions to prevent the spread of all flu strains.

“The most important thing you can do is to wash your hands frequently, cover your cough, and stay home if you are sick,” said Dr. Landers.

The basic precautions are:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home when you are sick
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing using a tissue, or cough or sneeze into your elbow to avoid contaminating your hands
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth as the virus can enter the body this way
- Practice other good health habits (eat healthy, get plenty of rest, don’t smoke)

The Oregon Public Health Division Web site www.flu.oregon.gov is updated regularly to provide information such as how to identify novel H1N1 flu and prevent its spread. The site includes materials for employers, medical providers, schools, parents and others.