

"A Message to the Community"

As in many other communities across the country, the 2009 H1N1 flu virus (formerly known as the swine flu virus) has reached Elyria and surrounding areas. Below is some important information for you to consider when making the decision to go to the ER for flu symptoms.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has confirmed that more than 99% of circulating influenza viruses in the United States today are the 2009 H1N1 virus. Therefore, it is likely that area residents experiencing flu symptoms have this virus. Rapid flu tests have a limited ability to detect the 2009 H1N1 flu virus, so a negative result cannot be used to "rule out" this type of flu. As a result, the CDC does not recommend routine flu testing for people well enough to be discharged home from the ER. Instead the focus has shifted to early treatment of those at high risk for flu complications, regardless of test results. **Those at high risk who should be seen by their doctor or in the ER when they develop flu symptoms include the following:**

- Children younger than 2 years old
- Adults 65 years of age or older
- Pregnant women
- Persons with the following conditions:
 - Chronic pulmonary (including asthma), cardiovascular (except hypertension), renal, hepatic, hematological (including sickle cell disease), or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus)
 - Disorders that can compromise respiratory function or the handling of respiratory secretions or that can increase the risk for aspiration (e.g. cognitive dysfunction, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders, or other neuromuscular disorders)
 - Immunosuppression, including that caused by medications or HIV
 - Persons younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy, because of an increased risk for Reye syndrome.

In addition, any person with flu symptoms exhibiting the following worrisome symptoms should seek immediate medical attention:

- Difficult or labored breathing
- Chest pain
- Dizziness or confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Symptom improvement but then a return or worsening within a few days

In children, please be aware of the following additional worrisome symptoms:

- Not drinking fluids
- Lethargy/not interacting with others
- Extreme irritability not responsive to comfort measures

For those people who display typical influenza symptoms and do not belong to the high risk group discussed above, we recommend that you consider staying home to help reduce the spread of the virus to others. Get adequate rest, drink plenty of fluids and treat symptoms with over-the-counter flu medications such as Tylenol. Consider resuming normal activity only when fever is absent after stopping fever medication for a full day.

Symptoms of 2009 H1N1 influenza are similar to seasonal flu, as follows:

- Fever (100 degrees F and above) that lasts 3-4 days
- Cough
- Headache
- Moderate to severe body aches and pains
- Exhaustion that can last 2-3 weeks
- Stuffy nose
- Sneezing
- Sometimes nausea, vomiting or diarrhea

This information is provided as a guideline to help you decide when to seek medical attention for flu symptoms during this time of heightened concern about the 2009 H1N1 flu virus. It should not be considered a substitute for advice from your personal doctor.