

Homeless Health News

From Health Care for the Homeless Network
A Community Project of Public Health - Seattle & King County

For Seattle-King County Area Shelters, Service Centers, & Housing Programs

April 28, 2009

Swine Flu in the News – What Shelters & Other Homeless Programs Need to Know

Swine flu is in the news, and your agency and the people you serve will want to know about how this may impact them. Here is some preliminary information to help you field questions and care for your clients. We know that you may have additional questions or concerns about this developing situation, so don't hesitate to contact Health Care for the Homeless Public Health Nurses (see below). We encourage you to share these tips with your program's supervisors, line staff, and volunteers.

Tip # 1: As Usual, Monitor Your Clients for Flu Symptoms, and Refer to Care if Necessary.

Symptoms of Swine Flu in Humans

The symptoms of swine flu are similar to symptoms of regular human flu. Fever, fatigue, body aches, headache and cough and are common. In addition to these symptoms, people with swine flu also have reported runny nose, vomiting and diarrhea.

Clients with the following symptoms should be referred to a health care provider or clinic:

- **Fever**, plus any of the following:
- Rapidly worsening illness
- Complaining of being very sick or unable get around as they normally would.
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath.
- Severe cough or severe sore throat
- Chest pain

If the following symptoms are mild, medical attention is **not** typically required:

- Runny nose or nasal stuffiness
- Mild headache
- Body aches
- Mild GI upset (more often seen in children) or poor appetite.
- Please keep in mind that these are basic guidelines. Use your judgment. If your client is fragile or has underlying medical problems like diabetes, heart disease or lung disease, they may be more vulnerable to the flu and its complications.

What to do if a client has flu symptoms?

- Offer tissues, a plastic bag to dispose of tissues, and hand sanitizer.
- If they cannot cover their mouth when they cough, offer a mask.
- Do your best to isolate the person from others.
- Encourage drinking fluids and monitor for worsening symptoms.

Questions or concerns about swine flu?

- Give your Public Health – Health Care for the Homeless Nurses a call!
 - Heather Barr, RN, PHN
(206) 263-8347 heather.barr@kingcounty.gov
 - Marcia Stone, RN, PHN
(206) 263-8340 marica.stone@kingcounty.gov
- Notify the Health Department Communicable Disease Section at (206) 296-4774 if you think you have an *unusual* number of people with flu symptoms.

Tip # 2: Pay Extra Attention to Your Prevention Efforts

- Wash hands often or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Make sure all rest rooms are well stocked with soap and paper towels.
- Provide hand sanitizer at key locations in your agency (by entry, phone, computers, elevators...)
- Cover your cough with inner elbow, inside of shirt/coat collar or tissues. Ask clients to cover their cough. Post signs to remind everyone.
- Avoid touching your face, nose, eyes, and mouth.
- Staff should stay home if they have flu symptoms; limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Stock up on supplies of tissues and hand sanitizer. Have masks on hand also.
- Provide plastic-lined wastebaskets in your facility for used tissues and masks. Keep a supply of gloves for staff to use when picking up used tissues or emptying wastebaskets.
- Clean and sanitize frequently touched surfaces several times per shift during cold and flu season. Pay particular attention to doorknobs, banisters, tabletops, and handrails.

Tip # 3: Stay Informed

Monitor the news and any special information or instructions from Public Health. Important news alerts are posted here:

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/health/swineflu>

Other resources that may be helpful:

An Influenza Pandemic Planning Guide for Homeless and Housing Service Providers

Seattle-King County, Washington

Edition #1: December 2006

http://www.pandemicpractices.org/files/71/71_guide.pdf

Disaster Planning for People Experiencing Homelessness

by Sabrina Edgington

National Health Care for the Homeless Council, March 2009

http://www.nhchc.org/DisasterPlanning_FNLDRFT3.pdf

Shelter Health: Essentials of Care for People Living in Shelter

by Ken Kraybill and Jeff Olivet

National Health Care for the Homeless Council, December 2005

<http://www.nhchc.org/shelterhealth.html>

Has Your Agency Joined the Community Communications Network?

- The Community Communications Network (CCN) is designed to improve Public Health's ability to outreach to vulnerable communities during an emergency.
- The CCN includes more than 200 agencies and provides after hours contact information for the majority.
- In a crisis, Public Health will use the CCN to contact agencies that provide services to vulnerable populations who may not have access to traditional communication channels.
- Community agencies pass this information to the vulnerable populations that they serve, and notify Public Health's Vulnerable Populations Action Team if their clients need any further assistance, resources, or information.

At this link you'll find more information about how to join the CCN:

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/preparedness/VPAT/about.aspx>

