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More Cases of H1N1 Influenza Confirmed in Milwaukee

Health Officials Say 224 Total Cases in Community

Fifty additional cases of H1N1 influenza have been confirmed in Milwaukee since Thursday, raising the total number of confirmed cases to 170, health officials said Friday. There are also 54 probable cases in the community.

Most cases that were previously classified as “probable” have been confirmed, due to improved laboratory testing in Milwaukee and Madison. Health officials expect that the remaining probable cases will be confirmed in the near future.

“We are conducting an intensive epidemiological investigation of the spread of the disease, which includes contacting and testing many people who have symptoms and who have had contact with a known probable or confirmed case,” said Paul Biedrzycki, Director of Disease Control and Environmental Health. “In addition, we will soon be able to test for confirmation of the virus in our own Milwaukee Health Department lab.”

Health officials again stressed their recommendation that any person in Milwaukee who has symptoms consistent with influenza stay home from work or school to help slow the spread of disease. Persons with symptoms should also consult with their healthcare provider. Symptoms of influenza include fever, cough, sore throat, and runny or stuffy nose. Staying home when ill is very important to prevent exposing high-risk individuals, such as pregnant women or people with weak immune systems, to this new virus.

“When there is an outbreak like this, it is incumbent upon the Health Department to plan for the worst,” said Commissioner of Health Bevan K. Baker. “At this point it appears that the new virus is no more severe than regular, seasonal influenza, but it is still poses a threat to the community, particularly to our vulnerable populations. This new virus is likely to become much more widespread than regular seasonal influenza, because nobody has any immunity to it and there is no vaccine yet. We will continue to be vigilant to protect the public’s health.”

Some ways to stay healthy and to protect yourself and those around you from getting the flu include:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with your upper sleeve. If you use a tissue, throw it away after one use.
- Use your own drinking cups and straws.
- Avoid being exposed to people who are sick with flu-like symptoms.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Eat nutritious meals, get plenty of rest and do not smoke.
- Frequently clean commonly touched surfaces (i.e., door knobs, refrigerator handle, telephone, faucets)

To learn more about swine influenza, visit <http://pandemic.wisconsin.gov/> or www.milwaukee.gov/health.

Or visit us on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/MKEhealth> or in Spanish at <http://twitter.com/MKEsalud>.