

Press Release

Monday, May 4, 2009

Local leaders meet to address swine flu concerns.

Local emergency planning leaders got together today in a special meeting to discuss the recent outbreak of H1N1, or Swine Flu, across the nation and now confirmed in Missouri.

Representatives from the Livingston County Health Center, Hedrick Medical Center, Chillicothe School District, Green Hills Community Action Agency, County Commission, Livingston County Sheriff's Office and Chillicothe Emergency Services met at the Courthouse to coordinate potential response plans.

Each entity represented has been planning for an emergency of any type for years, individually and as part of the larger Livingston County Local Emergency Planning Committee or LEPC. The LEPC group is led by the County Commission, who maintain the county's local emergency plan, or the 'master plan' for response in our county. Each organization also has its own to respond in case of disaster, and each group has its own mandates for response, according to federal and state guidelines. This approach is, of course, designed to provide a blanket response covering several areas of concern during an emergency.

The potential threat prompting today's meeting, swine flu, largely affects the communicable disease and healthcare sectors of the county, but could potentially require a more concerted effort from several other local agencies. Livingston County Health Center is spearheading the response, working closely with Hedrick Medical Center and various other healthcare outlets in the countywide area.

"We have been planning for possibility of a major flu outbreak for several years and we are now putting that plan into effect," said Sherry Weldon, Administrator. "We are working closely with the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services and local medical providers to detect any possible cases in our area. Currently no cases have been reported, but we are ready should cases occur in our county."

Livingston County Health Center is taking significant steps to deal with a new strain of swine flu, also known as the H1N1 virus, which has prompted federal officials to declare a nationwide health emergency. Missouri received confirmation from the Centers for Disease Control on May 1 that a woman in Platte County who recently traveled to Mexico had tested positive for the swine flu.

The health center is currently checking daily with the local hospital, schools, nursing homes and doctor's offices for reports of influenza like symptoms. Under normal circumstances, this type of surveillance is performed weekly, to identify possible trends of any type of communicable disease. There have been no probable OR confirmed cases of swine flu in Livingston County.

Missouri has stockpiled enough antiviral medications to treat more than 600,000 cases of swine flu. Those medications have now been distributed to each county in the state, including Livingston. The health center has received a percentage of its allocation of antiviral medications provided through the state stockpile. Two local pharmacies, Hy-Vee and Hometown, have agreed to house and dispense the medications. This stockpiled antiviral medication is to be used for treatment purposes only, not as a

preventive measure. The stockpile is targeted for the uninsured population in the county. Those with insurance should still be able to receive the medication through regular supplies. Patients must see a healthcare provider and be prescribed the medicine to receive it.

Swine flu is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. People do not normally get swine flu. But once it is transmitted to a person, it often can be spread to others through coughing and sneezing.

“There are basic measures that people can do to protect themselves, their families and communities from this virus,” said Weldon.

She said people can limit the spread of swine flu by:

- Washing hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Covering the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue in the trash after using it. Better yet, cough into your shoulder, where contact with others is limited, thus preventing the germs from being spread quickly.
- Trying to avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Staying home from work or school if you come down with the flu and limiting your contact with others to keep from infecting them.

The symptoms are similar to the regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also report diarrhea and vomiting.

“If you have recently traveled to areas reporting swine flu cases, or have been in direct contact with someone who has, and have influenza-like symptoms, contact your health care provider,” said Weldon. “Two common antiviral medications are available that are effective in fighting the virus and reducing the severity of flu symptoms.”

More information can be found at www.livcohealthcenter.com or the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services’ Web site at www.dhss.mo.gov/BT_Response/SwineFlu09.html.

#####