

Long-Term Care Survey Alert

Public Health :Why the CDC Is Keeping a Sharp Eye on the Swine Flu

Check out the good and bad news and a list of helpful resources.

In some ways, the novel H1N1 (swine flu) virus gives public authorities reason to be optimistic that it won't pose a major threat. Even so, there are warning signs that indicate caution is definitely in order.

The good news: There are some similarities between the novel H1N1 and the seasonal H1N1, according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention's **Anne Schuchat, MD**, in a May 28 CDC media briefing.

"Seasonal H1N1 often causes more disease in younger people compared with the other strains that can be more common in older people," she noted.

And "currently, the attack rates [involving the novel H1N1]... are fairly consistent with what we see with seasonal flu."

However, the CDC is also seeing some aspects that are very different from seasonal patterns, Schuchat warned. These include the following:

- The virus is circulating much later than the annual flu viruses.

"We're really not seeing much of any other seasonal flu viruses any more," said Schuchat.

- The strain is a novel virus. The CDC doesn't think much of the population has immunity to the virus. And that's different from the seasonal strain, cautioned Schuchat. "The current seasonal flu vaccine that people got earlier this past year does not provide protection against the strain so far as we know."
- Transmission is continuing. The CDC believes that active transmission and increased illness, including hospitalizations and deaths, are ongoing in areas of the country, such as New York City, and several other communities. And since the CDC media update, the World Health Organization declared a pandemic.

More good news: In late May, the CDC shipped candidate virus strains to several different manufacturers. "Manufacturers involved in developing and producing the novel H1N1 vaccine will start the process by producing candidate lots in the coming weeks," reported Schuchat.

Important resources: To stay on top of the latest information on H1N1, go to <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/update.htm>. The World Health Organization includes updates on the global flu situation at www.who.int/csr/don/2009_06_05/en/index.html. Information about antiviral drug use for novel H1N1 and recommendations for people age 65 and older can be found at www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/recommendations.htm. If you're looking for a checklist for developing a pandemic flu plan, go to www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/healthcare/longtermcarechecklist.html.