

May 5, 2009

DSHS Issues ER Use Guidance

The Texas Department of State Health Services is asking Texans to use discretion and not automatically seek treatment for flu-like symptoms in hospital emergency rooms.

Reports of periodic overcrowding of hospital ERs around the state prompted the advice from DSHS officials who said many people showing up in ERs may have nothing more than seasonal allergies or mild colds.

The primary symptoms of H1N1 flu have generally been high fever above 101 degrees Fahrenheit, along with a cough and sore throat. Most cases have been relatively mild so far.

DSHS officials said even those with influenza -- H1N1 flu or seasonal flu -- generally do not need emergency treatment. Most low-risk people can be safely treated at home with appropriate fluid intake, fever-reducing medication, rest and careful monitoring. However, emergency treatment would be appropriate for anyone with one of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing
- Dehydration symptoms (such as dizziness when standing, absence of urination, or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry)
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Purple or blue discoloration of the lips
- Unexplained confusion, unresponsiveness, sudden dizziness or seizures
- Severe or persistent vomiting.

DSHS officials recommend that people with flu-like symptoms who also have underlying health problems that can put them at higher risk of complications if they get the flu should call their doctor or other health care provider for guidance. Individuals with increased risk of complications include:

- Children under 5 years of age
- Infants under 12 months are especially vulnerable
- Adults and children who have chronic lung, heart, liver, blood, nerve, muscular or metabolic disorders, including asthma and diabetes
- Adults and children who have immunodeficiency or suppression (including immunosuppression caused by medications or by HIV)
- Adults 50 years or older, especially those over 65
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.
- Children and adolescents (ages 6 months to 18 years) who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy and who might be at risk for experiencing Reye's syndrome after influenza virus infections

More information about when to seek emergency care, when to contact a doctor and how to take care of flu patients at home is available online at:

www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance_homecare.htm.