



Pima County Health Department

www.pimahealth.org

Flu Guidance for Shelters Summer 2009

Influenza (flu) is a disease that can be easily passed to people in a shelter. Flu is common during the winter months, but can also make people sick in the summer. A new type of flu, also known as the swine flu, is causing sickness in Pima County.

Most of the flu cases going around right now are caused by the new flu. Many people may be at risk for this flu. People with flu symptoms should take steps to reduce the spread of the flu in the shelter.

Signs of the new flu

Signs are the same as with most flu illness, and can include fever, cough, sore throat, headache, tiredness, stuffy or runny nose, chills, body aches, vomiting and diarrhea.

How the new flu spreads

The new flu probably spreads the same way as other flu illness. Flu spreads from people who are sick with the flu coughing or sneezing around people who are not sick. A person can also get sick by touching something with the flu germ on it and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes.

How to prevent the flu

- Everyone in the shelter should cough and sneeze into their sleeve or into a tissue. This helps keep hands clean and free from flu germs.
- Throw all used tissues into the trash and clean hands each time a tissue is used.
- Don't touch your eyes, nose and mouth without cleaning hands.
- Make hand washing or alcohol based hand gel easily available in common areas of the shelter, such as the lounge, bathrooms and dining areas. Put up signs in the common areas of the shelter about hand washing and the flu.
- Staff, volunteers and clients should always clean their hands before handling food.
- Instruct staff, volunteers and clients to report any flu symptoms they have had within the past 7 days. Give clear instructions for reporting symptoms.
- Direct shelter staff and volunteers to carefully watch for signs of the flu.
- Staff and volunteers who develop flu symptoms should stay at home for at least 7 days. If they still have symptoms after 7 days they need to stay home until they are well for at least 24 hours.
- Clients that get flu symptoms while in the shelter should be separated from non-sick clients
- Linens, eating utensils, dishes and other common items do not need to be cleaned separately, but should be cleaned prior to use by others. Linens should be washed using laundry soap and dried on a hot setting.



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- Refer to “How to Sanitize Everyday Surfaces and Stop the Spread of Flu Virus” for cleaning surfaces of germs (Attached)

What to do with sick clients

- Sick people should stay away from common areas and other clients
- Limit the number of staff who take care of the sick clients. Staff not assigned for caring for sick clients should not have contact with them.
 - Staff caring for the sick should not be at risk for severe flu as listed below.
 - Staff caring for the sick should be provided with disposable gloves, gowns and masks for protection. Goggles may also help protect staff from sick clients that sneeze.
- Limit sick clients from walking through the shelter
- Provide sick clients with fluids, tissues, plastic bags for used tissues and a way to clean their hands

Who is at risk for severe flu symptoms

Children under age 5 or adults over age 65 are at risk for severe symptoms, and so are those with certain diseases or conditions including:

- Heart, lung, liver, kidney, or blood disease
- Diabetes
- Weak Immune System due to disease or medication
- Diseases that affect the body and muscles, such as cerebral palsy
- Diseases that affect the brain or nerves, such as epilepsy or stroke
- Pregnancy
- Obesity
- Children under age 19 who take daily aspirin for medical reasons

Anyone at risk for more severe flu should seek medical care when symptoms start because they may be helped by medication.

Seek medical care IMMEDIATELY for anyone with severe symptoms

Severe symptoms for adults can include:

- difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- pain or pressure in the chest or stomach
- sudden dizziness and/or confusion
- severe vomiting

Severe symptoms for children can include:

- slow irregular breaths
- rapid heart beat
- difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- change in color, often with blue around the mouth and fingers
- dehydration



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- change in mental status and may be irritable

When to contact the Health Department

These steps are recommended to reduce the spread of flu in your shelter. If you have any questions about any of this information, please call the Pima County Health Department at 243-7797 or go to our web-site <http://www.pimahealth.org/>.