

Sugar Land takes a proactive approach to this new strain of flu that made its debut last April



When
Swine Flu
Hits Home

Written by Lesley Clinton

Signs and Symptoms to Watch for to Help Keep your Sugar Land Family Healthy

Images of face masks on the news last spring during the swine flu outbreak may seem like a distant nightmare, but now is not the time to become lax in hygiene habits. Experts fear that we are in for another round of swine flu, officially called H1N1 virus, this fall.

This new strain of influenza in humans made its debut in April 2009. “Given that the virus has not stopped producing illness during this summer season...it is very likely that we will be facing a very widespread influenza season with many more cases than in a normal season,” explains Fort Bend County Health & Human Services (HHS) deputy director Kaye Reynolds.

Local Authorities Take Action

Rather than panicking, Sugar Land citizens should take pride in knowing that local authorities are working proactively to prepare for widespread illness. Over the summer, HHS staff and Medical Reserve Corps volunteers held a mass vaccination exercise attended by 48 of Fort Bend’s first responders and their families, according to Karl Floyd from HHS.

Participants in the walk-through rehearsed the entire vaccination process. This allowed HHS to identify potential bottle-necks and estimate how long it will take to immunize all county EMS and fire department personnel, police officers, public health workers, and their families—about 6,000 people. “The big question is if and when vaccine will be available,” says Reynolds.

High Risk Groups

And if the vaccine supply is limited? Reynolds says that public officials will have to make tough choices about who receives the inoculation first. High-risk groups such as pregnant women are top priority. “[They] are most likely to have...severe complications or death from the virus,” she says. “Also, it is very important to vaccinate the segment of the community that spreads diseases the most – our school-aged children.”

FBISD officials maintain communication with HHS for the latest H1N1 management guidance. FBISD Lead Nurse Patsy Bennett says, “There has been talk that we might have to extend the school year.” This could happen if schools close due to high staff absenteeism, a worst-case scenario.



Swine Flu Emergency Warning Signs

CHILDREN

- + Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- + Bluish or gray skin color
- + Not drinking enough fluids
- + Severe or persistent vomiting
- + Not waking up or not interacting
- + Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- + Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

ADULTS

- + Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- + Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- + Sudden dizziness
- + Confusion
- + Severe or persistent vomiting
- + Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Source: cdc.gov



Teaching children proper and consistent hand washing techniques is vital to good health. Experts recommend rubbing hands together with soap and water for 15-20 seconds

Consistent Hand Washing

Reynolds urges citizens to help minimize the spread of the flu by following the guidance of public health officials and medical providers. She emphatically promotes good hand washing habits. Bennett echoes this advice and specifies, "Soap and water is by far the best thing over hand sanitizer." Bennett also stresses the importance of avoiding contact with others when experiencing flu-like symptoms, which include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches, chills, fatigue, and, sometimes, diarrhea and vomiting. "Even with our staff—they feel obligated to be there, but they're not doing anyone a favor by showing up ill," she says. She also warns that in some flu cases fever is not present. When in doubt, have your doctor check it out. **SLM**

LESLEY CLINTON grew up in Sugar Land. She is a wife, mother, and educator with a MA in Teaching.

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NOW IN SUGAR LAND



The CDC is encouraging swine flu vaccinations for pregnant women

Healthy Habits for Flu Season and Beyond

- + Wash your hands often and thoroughly. Scrub your hands, wrists, and under your nails.
- + Ask your doctor about getting vaccinated for the seasonal flu and for the H1N1 virus.
- + Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Sneeze into your elbow, not your hand.
- + Don't share drinks or food.
- + Use hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.
- + Throw away tissues immediately after using them.
- + Eat right and get rest.
- + If you have flu-like symptoms, avoid contact with others and see your doctor.
- + If you have the flu, stay at home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone.
- + Let your physician decide whether you need an antiviral medication.
- + Register for emergency updates through Sugar Land's Connect CTY system. Visit sugarlandtx.gov.
- + Educate yourself: visit flu.gov or cdc.gov.

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