



## **Department of Public Health Collaborates with Local Hospitals for Flu Preparations**

El Paso, Texas – **October 23, 2009** - Throughout the United States, doctor's offices and hospitals have seen higher rates of influenza-like illness than expected for this time of year. The same trend is being observed in El Paso.

In collaboration with public and private healthcare agencies, the Department of Public Health would like to take this opportunity to prepare the community for the possible opening of alternate care sites at all local hospitals. These alternate care sites are internal or external facilities located on hospital property whose main purpose is to prevent the critical patients in the emergency rooms from being exposed to the flu and further complicating their conditions. These facilities will be climate controlled and if you do arrive at a hospital for influenza-like illness, please look for signs directing you to the alternate care sites. These sites have the additional benefit of allowing healthcare workers to move quickly to evaluate and treat patients who present with symptoms of influenza.

The establishment of alternate care sites is a common practice for addressing situations where there are larger- than-usual numbers of patients presenting at hospitals. Because they have seen larger volumes of influenza-like illness than we have in El Paso, hospitals in other Texas cities such as Austin, Dallas and Houston have already implemented this practice. As flu cases continue to increase, El Paso is preparing to follow a similar model.

The Department of Public Health Director, Michael Hill says that these plans are not unusual, "hospitals have plans for many types of events and have trained to prepare their facilities to take care of the public in situations such like this," Hill said.

Dr. Hector Ocaranza, Health Authority for the Department of Public Health states that it is important to remain calm and reminds the public about a few points regarding influenza-like illness.

Treatment for influenza-like illness is given by physicians on a case-by-case basis and most will be resolved with time. Symptoms of influenza-like illness are:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Abdominal pain

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- Vomiting
- Headache

If you have the above symptoms, follow these recommendations from Dr. Ocaranza:

- Drink plenty of fluids (water, Pedialyte)
- Get plenty of rest
- Stay home from work or school until 24 hours after the fever has subsided without the help of fever-reducers
- Fever-reducers or other medications as advised by your physician
- Avoid aspirin and compounds containing acetylsalicylic acid (like Pepto-Bismol)
- Avoid overcrowding emergency rooms and doctor's offices

Seek medical care if you have the following symptoms:

- Problems breathing
- Not drinking or eating
- Decreased activity
- Feeling worse as days go by

Seek emergency care and call 911 if the following symptoms appear:

- Bluish discoloration
- Pale complexion
- Rapid breathing
- Difficulty waking up

Lastly, area hospitals ask that before you arrive at their facility, please call ahead to inquire on their visitor's policy. Some hospitals are taking further measures to decrease the spread of disease by not allowing minors as visitors.



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