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HEALTH PROVIDER ALERT

Revised Assessment and Treatment Recommendations For Influenza-Like-Illness

Suspected H1N1 Flu is present throughout the County with significant outbreaks in Carpinteria and Santa Barbara (UCSB) and confirmed cases in Lompoc and Santa Maria. Hospitalizations associated with flu have increased. The Public Health Department strongly recommends early identification of illness, assessment of risk and targeted treatment.

In Santa Barbara County, over half (58%) of the 26 Santa Barbara County residents hospitalized with complications of H1N1 since late June were younger than 19 years old. 75% of people placed in intensive care units due to H1N1 complications were 16 or younger. To date, the only death in the County has been a teenager with multiple medical conditions.

Pregnant women are at increased risk of complications and death from H1N1 Flu infection. Nationally, over 25% of pregnant women who were hospitalized for H1N1 Flu have died. Although the total number of deaths is relatively small (28 as of October 1, 2009), the concern is very great.

The CDC case definition of influenza-like-illness (ILI) is fever and cough; frequently other symptoms are present, e.g. sudden onset of malaise, body aches, sore throat, headache, GI distress. Fever and cough are common symptoms of many viral upper respiratory infections. The intensity of symptoms is usually more severe and systemic with influenza.

The groups at increased risk for severe disease and complications includes children less than two years old, pregnant women, children and adults with medical conditions that compromise respiratory, immune, neuromuscular, renal or cardiac status, and children & teens on long term aspirin therapy.

The PHD strongly recommends that healthcare providers:

- Inform patients of their high risk status and urge high risk patients to seek care immediately with the onset of ILI.
- Adopt the CDC recommendation of scheduling a same day medical evaluation or prescribing oseltamivir or zanamivir for high risk patients who meet the case definition of ILI.
 - Treatment with antiviral medication in high risk individuals is advised as early as possible but also as long as the patient has fever or substantial illness. Prior history of vaccination with seasonal or H1N1 vaccines does not alter the treatment recommendation.

- Consider the use of a checklist or self-assessment tool in the triage of patients calling with ILI complaints in order to identify average and high risk groups.
 - Also, ask patients about severity of symptoms and recovery-relapse pattern to determine if referral to urgent care or emergency care is indicated.
- Provide available H1N1 Flumist vaccine to State recommended groups, i.e. eligible children 2 – 9 years old, parents, siblings & caretakers of infants less than 6 months old and, if supply is adequate, eligible children 10 - 18 years old.
 - Healthcare workers, other high risk groups and children with contraindications for live viral vaccines are not eligible for this vaccine at this time.
- Utilize standard methods to prevent transmission of infection to healthcare workers: hand washing, N95 respirators, masking of patients, environmental cleansing, and self-monitoring of temperature & cough. Consider early treatment of exposed healthcare workers with antivirals for ILI rather than exposure prophylaxis (CDC recommendation).
- The key messages that follow will be issued by the PHD and seeks to inform the public. Clinicians should be aware that patients may contact providers to obtain care consistent with this guidance.

Public Message

Suspected H1N1 Flu is present throughout the County with significant outbreaks in Carpinteria and Santa Barbara (UCSB) and confirmed cases in Lompoc and Santa Maria. The Public Health Department strongly recommends that all residents of the County be aware and prepare to respond according to these guidelines:

- **H1N1 Flu is suspected when a person develops fever and cough.** Many viral infections cause these symptoms but influenza is usually more severe and has a sudden onset of fever, cough, body aches, sore throat, chills, headache, and vomiting.
- **The flowing groups of patients are at increased risk** for severe disease and complications with influenza. Prompt medical evaluation by phone or appointment is very important. Treatment is commonly needed. Starting medication early helps in the recovery and prevention of complications from H1N1 Flu.
 - **Pregnant women**
 - **Children under two years of age**
 - **Children 2-18 years of age who have a medical condition** that affects the respiratory, immune, nervous or skeletal systems, such as asthma, cystic fibrosis, cancer, cerebral palsy, or muscular dystrophy.
 - **Adults who have a medical condition** that affects the respiratory, heart, immune, kidney, nervous or skeletal systems, such as asthma, emphysema, heart failure, cancer, immune suppressing medications, diabetes, kidney failure, or multiple sclerosis.
- **Healthy children and adults** with suspected influenza should be taken care of in the home away from others to decrease the spread of illness. They should rest, drink extra fluids and take fever & pain relievers as needed.
 - **Healthy children and adults** who have severe symptoms or begin to recover and then relapse with worse symptoms should contact their healthcare provider immediately. A complication from H1N1 Flu may develop that requires evaluation and treatment.

Resources for triage tools

- Emory University/CDC triage tool:
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/clinicians/pdf/adultalgorithm.pdf>

- Children's Healthcare of Atlanta self assessment tool:
<http://www.choa.org/default.aspx?id=8792>
- PHD phone online triage tool for all ages: Available mid October, call PHD Provider Line 681-4373

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