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General questions: Jim Sellers, 503-945-5738

Technical questions: Dr. Emilio DeBess, 971-673-1111

120 cases of H1N1 swine flu reported in Oregon; twice-weekly reporting to begin Tuesday

Fifty-six percent of Oregon's 275 lab-confirmed influenza samples tested since March 4 have been strains of seasonal flu, with the balance testing as H1N1 swine flu.

This puts into perspective the scope of the swine flu outbreak in Oregon, which has seen 120 confirmed cases in 11 counties. By contrast, the Oregon State Public Health Laboratory has confirmed 155 cases of seasonal flu during the period.

"Influenza of any kind is serious," says Dr. Mel Kohn, head of the Oregon Department of Human Services Public Health Division. "The big news has been about swine flu, but Oregonians should take any strain of influenza seriously."

Kohn says strains of seasonal flu affect an estimated one in 10 Oregonians annually, and account for approximately 400 annual Oregon deaths and 36,000 nationwide. People in high-risk groups – infants, pregnant women and people older than 65 – should see their doctor if they experience flu symptoms, he says.

"We're still concerned about the potential for this new strain to cause more serious illness next season," he says. "Over the coming months we will be working to prepare for that possibility."

Seven Oregonians have been hospitalized with the swine flu. No Oregon deaths have been reported. Of the 120 confirmed cases so far, 35 were children, 31 teens and 54 adults. Counties with confirmed swine flu cases are Benton (1), Clackamas (6), Clatsop (1), Columbia (1), Lane (8), Marion (5), Multnomah (31), Polk (39), Umatilla (3), Washington (24) and Yamhill (1).

“I am hopeful we will have a vaccine against H1N1 swine flu but we don’t yet have any specific information,” Kohn says. “From the confirmed cases we’ve seen over the past 10 weeks, it appears vaccines against normal seasonal influenza would help protect people against a majority of flu cases.”

Beginning May 26, the DHS Public Health Division will move from daily to twice-weekly posting of numbers of confirmed cases of both swine and seasonal influenza at www.flu.oregon.gov on Tuesdays and Fridays.

This new strain of virus known as “swine flu” actually has pieces of swine, bird and human flu viruses, Kohn says. Its causes symptoms similar to those of normal seasonal influenza such as fever, lethargy, coughing and lack of appetite, sometimes accompanied by runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.