

News Release – 2 pages

From the Knox County Health Department

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Testing limitations restrict confirmations but does not limit treatment

While the Knox County Health Department has reported two confirmed cases of the H1N1 flu, local health officials indicate that there are probably more cases than what's being reported. That's because testing limitations at the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and the high cost of H1N1 testing at commercial labs is prohibiting many local doctors from being able to confirm suspect cases. But that does not mean patients are not receiving the correct treatment.

“When a patient presents with flu-like symptoms and tests positive for influenza A, doctors are prescribing anti-viral medication which would be the course of action if the patient were confirmed as having H1N1,” said Health Commissioner Dennis Murray. “Whether a person has regular Influenza A or H1N1 influenza, the treatment is the same anti-viral medication.”

It is unusual to see regular Influenza A circulating in large numbers at this time of the year. According to ODH, 99 percent of the Influenza A samples that have been sent to the state lab have tested positive for H1N1.

Since the H1N1 flu has been confirmed throughout the state, ODH has limited testing at its labs to only those cases where the individual is hospitalized or there is a cluster of suspect individuals. The cost to test for H1N1 at a commercial lab is more than \$400 and is not covered by health insurance.

“No doubt, it is confusing,” said Murray. “People are being told by their doctors that they have H1N1, but the health department is not reporting any increase in confirmed cases.”

Technically, a confirmed case is one that is “confirmed through testing,” said Murray, “so we can't report confirmed cases without test results. But we do acknowledge that there are more cases of H1N1 than just the two we have confirmed and we expect to see more unconfirmed cases.”

Murray said he has heard from at least two doctor's offices that have had patients that they defined as having H1N1. So far, all of the patients have been school-age children. They have been treated with anti-viral medication and appear to be recovering.

The schools where the students attend have been notified, but the schools have not been identified. "It appears that so far, the cases are isolated," said Murray. "Regardless of what schools the students attend, parents need to pay attention to their child's health whether we are talking about the regular flu or H1N1."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers this advice: If your child is 5 years or older and otherwise healthy and gets flu-like symptoms, including a fever and/or cough, consult your doctor as needed and make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks enough fluids.

If your child is younger than 5, or of any age and has a medical condition like asthma, diabetes, or a neurological problem and develops flu-like symptoms, including a fever and/or cough, call your doctor or get medical attention. This is because younger children and children who have chronic medical conditions (like asthma or diabetes) may be at higher risk of serious complications from influenza infection, including the new H1N1.

"Talk to your doctor early if you are worried about your child's illness," said Murray. The health department has put together a new brochure for parents based on information provided by the CDC. Entitled "Tackle the Flu," it can be downloaded from the health department's web site at www.knoxhealth.com or parents can pick up a copy at the health department, 11660 Upper Gilchrist Rd.