

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SMH Implements Masking Protocol During Flu Season

PLYMOUTH, N.H.--- Flu season is upon us and the 2009 H1N1 flu outbreak is widespread in New Hampshire. To protect patients and providers, Speare Memorial Hospital has recommended all health care workers be immunized for both seasonal and H1N1 flu. Healthcare workers who do not get vaccinated will be required to wear a surgical mask when providing direct patient care.

“Our hospital-wide H1N1 task force reviewed Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines and policies at other hospitals before submitting a masking protocol for approval to senior management,” explains SMH Safety Coordinator Hoby Harmon, and chair of the hospital’s H1N1 task force. “Given some of our healthcare providers cannot, or choose not to be vaccinated for flu, wearing a standard surgical mask when providing direct patient care is an equally effective alternative for preventing the spread of flu. Doing so protects our patients and our providers.” Harmon notes that even providers who have received the recommended vaccines may choose to also wear a mask.

Masks will also be made available to visiting family members at the nurses station, as well as patients in both the Emergency Department and Outpatient Registration areas. Harmon says making the masks available to everyone allows them to be proactive in protecting their own health. Should patients in greater numbers begin presenting with flu like illness in the Emergency Department, a separate waiting area will be set-up.

Other steps Speare Memorial Hospital is taking to help prevent the spread of illness is providing individual bottles of hand sanitizer to inpatients. Publicly accessible, free standing hand sanitizer units will also be placed in strategic locations throughout the hospital. Additionally, staff and volunteer education has been provided to further raise awareness about effective prevention measures.

“In addition to vaccine and masking, common, everyday actions can help keep you healthy,” stresses Andrea Harper, SMH infection preventionist.

- Cover you nose and mouth with a tissue, or use your elbow, when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer are a good alternative when soap and water is not available.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- Stay home if you are sick.

Emergency Warning Signs of Severe Illness

According to the CDC, symptoms of H1N1 flu are similar to those of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache and chills. If you or a family member gets sick, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone. This means avoiding normal activities including work, school, travel, shopping, social events and public gatherings. Seek immediate medical attention if you or a family member has warning signs of severe illness.

Warning signs in children:

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

Warning signs in adults:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or sudden pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

For more information about seasonal and/or H1N1 flu and you, visit www.flu.gov or call 800-CDC-INFO.

Spere Memorial Hospital is a 24-hour, acute care, non-profit community hospital and health care provider serving Plymouth and the communities of central New Hampshire for more than a century. Visit online at www.spearehospital.com and join us on Facebook.

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