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PRESS RELEASE FROM THE AMERICAN RED CROSS

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DO WE REALLY HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THE H1N1 FLU?

During the past two weeks there has been a lot of controversy about the H1N1 influenza, also known as “Swine Flu”. The answer to the question posed by the title of this article is: yes. During the past week, a number of people from your local MN Department of Health, Emergency Management, Public Safety, EMS groups, schools, hospitals and other agencies met to talk, at length, about the “what if’s” that may face us here in rural Southwest Minnesota.

At this time, there has been only one confirmed case of H1N1 in the state of Minnesota, but there are eleven probable cases as well.

This week we will share information concerning the swine flu/H1N1 influenza that will help you to be better informed and help you to **‘BE SAFE’**.

What is H1N1 influenza (a/k/a the swine flu)?

This is a respiratory illness caused by a virus that can infect humans.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 influenza?

Symptoms include, but are not limited to: a fever over 100 degrees; a persistent cough; a sore throat; a stuffy nose and in some cases, diarrhea and vomiting.

How is H1N1 influenza spread?

It can be spread when someone coughs or sneezes or by touching something (a door knob, counter top, faucet, sharing a cup, etc.) that has a flu virus already on it and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth afterwards.

How can I protect myself and my family from catching H1N1 influenza?

Always cover your nose and mouth with a tissue every time you cough or sneeze. Covering your nose or mouth with your hand is not sufficient UNLESS you wash your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water afterward. The used tissue must also be

disposed of properly so that no one else will come in contact with it. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve.

Wash your hands often with soap and hot water. This should happen every time you use the restroom, before eating or drinking and after coughing or sneezing. If you don't have access to soap and hot water, use an antiseptic /alcohol-based hand cleaner. Avoid shaking hands or touching others as much as possible.

Don't touch your face, eyes, nose or mouth unless absolutely necessary AND unless you have sanitized your hands.

Avoid close contact with anyone who is sick whenever possible.

Take care of yourself by eating nutritiously, getting enough sleep and exercising.

Use good judgment concerning being in groups or crowds of other people when it isn't necessary. This will limit your exposure to someone who may have H1N1 influenza.

What do I do if I think I or someone close to me has H1N1 influenza?

Call your doctor – do NOT go to your doctor's office unless told to do so. Your doctor will determine if you need testing or treatment. If H1N1 influenza is suspected, you should avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep the virus from spreading to others.

Join us next week when **"BE SAFE"** will update you further on this topic based on developments in the week that has passed.

This information is sponsored by the Marshall Independent and brought to you by the American Red Cross and taken from information provided by the Minnesota Department of Health. If you have any questions or need further information on the topic covered in this article, please contact either your local Department of Public Health, go on-line to www.health.state.mn.us or contact your local American Red Cross Chapter at 1-507-532-5565.