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The Department of Health and Human Services today issued a nationwide public health emergency declaration in response to recent human infections with a newly discovered swine influenza A (swine flu) virus. Declaring a Public Health Emergency (PHE) allows DHHS flexibility in the emergency use of detection and treatment modalities that are not usually allowed. Such a declaration does NOT mean that a pandemic has been declared, but as any new influenza subtype, this virus is a pandemic threat. This influenza virus (H1N1) has not been identified in humans before. Viruses are very contagious, and may cause more serious symptoms in the immunocompromised and the elderly and the young. Typical flu-like symptoms include: fever, myalgias (body aches), malaise (fatigue), cough, sore throat. Laboratory-confirmed cases have been identified in Mexico, Canada, and in the US: California, Kansas, New York City, Ohio, and Texas. As always, routine use of universal precautions should be used; see below for additional information and recommendations.

- *Take initial history from the patient while standing a few feet away, to determine which PPE may be needed.*
- *Place a mask on all patients with suspected symptoms, and non-rebreather masks when oxygen is required. Droplet producing procedures should be avoided whenever possible including nebulizers, bag-valve-mask, suctioning or intubation. If bag-valve-masks are needed, use those with HEPA filters whenever possible. If these procedures are required, or the patient will not tolerate a mask, ensure that you are taking adequate droplet precautions, including a respirator mask, eye protection and gloves.*
- *Alert receiving hospital personnel of the possibility of an infectious patient as soon as possible and hold suspected infectious patients in the ambulance until their destination in the hospital is known, rather than immediately moving them into an open area in the emergency department.*
- *If patients are noncommunicative or unreliable (cognitively impaired), please obtain as much travel and symptom history from caregivers and/or family as possible. Relay such information to triage; those with positive risk factors will be isolated, and specimens will be quarantined as well.*
- *Perform a thorough cleaning of the stretcher and all equipment that has come in contact with or been within 2 meters (6.5 feet) with an approved disinfectant, upon completion of the call.*

EMS Providers can contribute much to trend identification. We have asked that all triage nurses identify units/EMS providers on the triage sheets. If they do not ask who you are, please tell them. Stay rested, use universal precautions, and use masks on patients if you suspect they may have flu-like symptoms. Please contact the EMS Coordinators (Anthony Kepler and Kevin Burns), or myself if you have any questions.

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Other resources: <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/mitigation.htm>

