

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 27, 2009

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
Department of Health
Commonwealth News Bureau
Room 308, Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

CONTACT: Stacy Kriedeman
(717) 787-1783

**PENNSYLVANIA WORKING CLOSELY WITH FEDERAL
PARTNERS TO CONTAIN IMPACT OF SWINE FLU**
Federal Health and Human Services Department declares a Public Health Emergency

HARRISBURG – The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is working with federal officials to contain the impact of an outbreak of swine flu in Mexico that resulted in the declaration of a national public health emergency in the United States.

The Department of Health is working to educate the public and health care providers of recommended steps to prepare for potential cases of swine influenza in Pennsylvania.

“At this point we do not have any confirmed cases of swine influenza in Pennsylvania, but we remain in constant communication with health officials at all levels,” said Health Secretary Everette James. “We are committed to keeping our health care providers, local health agencies, and the public informed as this situation develops.”

“The federal public health emergency declaration is simply a tool that allows for preparation and mobilization of resources to plan for and respond to this virus outbreak if we begin to see cases in Pennsylvania,” said Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency Director Robert French. “We are coordinating our activities closely with our federal partners and all the public health and emergency agencies across the state,” said French.

The Department of Health has notified health care providers across Pennsylvania to be watchful for patients with influenza-like illness who may have been exposed to the new swine

flu strain and to immediately inform the local health department of any suspected cases. The department will assist all health care providers in evaluating the patients, recommending control measures, and assisting in specimen collection and testing when indicated.

This notification follows confirmation of a new strain of swine influenza A/H1N1 virus in Mexico and five locations in the U.S., including New York and Ohio. To date, all U.S. cases were “mild” with only one person requiring brief hospitalization.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, swine influenza A/H1N1 is a new strain of influenza that has not previously been detected in swine or humans. The virus has also been confirmed in Canada and Mexico. It is still safe to eat pork and pork products.

The Department of Health provided information to all of the state’s health care providers and hospitals late Friday regarding the swine flu, including how to quickly report possible cases and how to submit samples for testing. Anyone who has traveled to or from the affected areas and has a respiratory illness should contact their health care provider or local health department before seeking health care.

Swine influenza is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. Outbreaks of swine flu happen regularly in pigs. Before the current outbreak, people rarely got swine flu, and usually only if they were in very close proximity to infected pigs. However, during the current outbreak, the virus is able to spread from person-to-person.

Symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to those of regular or seasonal flu and include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite and coughing. Some with swine flu also have reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Although winter is over, there is still a low level of seasonal influenza occurring in the state.

There is no vaccine available at this time, but the swine flu can be treated with certain antiviral drugs. Persons with swine flu are contagious for up to seven days or longer after the onset of illness, so it is important to take the following steps to prevent spreading the virus to others:

- Stay home when you are sick to avoid spreading illness to others;
- Cough or sneeze into the bend of your elbow or a tissue and properly dispose of used tissues;
- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer;
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth;
- Stay healthy by eating a balanced diet, drinking plenty of water and getting plenty of rest and exercise; and
- Seek care if you have influenza-like illness.

The CDC is asking that those individuals who have a recent history of travel and experience mild, flu-like symptoms to stay home. However, if you feel your symptoms worsen or become severe, call or visit your health care provider.

For more information on Swine Influenza A/H1N1, contact the Department of Health at 1-877-PA-HEALTH or visit www.health.state.pa.us.

###