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Media Contact: Dianne Shipley, 941-861-2852; 941-302-1058; Dianne_Shipley@doh.state.fl.us
Or Crystal Bruce, 941-861-2876; Crystal_Bruce@doh.state.fl.us

Hospitals and Health Departments in a three-county area united in Swine Flu response

This morning, April 27, hospitals and health departments from Sarasota, Charlotte and DeSoto counties met to discuss swine flu and community response plans. They are united in supporting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Florida Department of Health response. Organizations included in this effort are Charlotte Regional Medical Center, DeSoto Memorial Hospital, Doctor's Hospital of Sarasota, Englewood Community Hospital, Fawcett Memorial Hospital, Peace River Regional Medical Center, Sarasota Memorial Health Care System and Venice Regional Medical Center, as well as the Charlotte, DeSoto and Sarasota County Health Departments.

While no cases have been identified in Florida at this time, cases of swine flu have been confirmed in the U.S., according to the CDC. There are an undetermined number of cases in Mexico reaching into the hundreds.

"This is a situation where we must all be on the alert," said Dr. Ana Viamonte Ros, Florida's State Surgeon General. "We have increased our surveillance and we're telling doctors that since the flu season is waning, if they see patients with sudden onset high fever and a cough or sore throat, they should collect a specimen for testing."

Dr. Viamonte Ros said the Florida Department of Health has a response plan and has put it into play. "Our state laboratories have the equipment necessary and our personnel are trained in identifying influenza samples. We have increased surveillance, alerted doctors and are working with our local health departments," she said.

Florida has prepared for influenza events:

- All state laboratories have the facilities to safely identify influenza samples.
- The state has almost 100 sentinel physicians who report any unusual influenza like activity to DOH and the CDC.
- We have the ability to monitor the sale of over the counter drugs, as an early warning sign for increased influenza activity.

The State Surgeon General provided these recommendations:

- As always, people with respiratory illness should stay home from work or school to avoid spreading infections, including influenza, to others in the community.
- Avoid close contact with people who are coughing or otherwise appear ill.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Wash hands frequently to lessen the spread of respiratory illness.
- People experiencing cough, fever and fatigue, possibly along with diarrhea and vomiting, should contact their physician.

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- If you think you have influenza, please call your health care provider and discuss whether you need to be seen in their office or emergency department or stay home.

Swine influenza viruses are not transmitted by food and a person cannot get swine influenza from eating pork products. The infections appear to spread from person to person.

Dr. Viamonte Ros said Florida is receiving frequent updates from the CDC, and is working with local health departments to monitor the situation and immediately follow up on any suspected cases. The CDC has created a Webpage with information at www.cdc.gov/swineflu .

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