

Testing for H1N1 unnecessary



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Wednesday, 16 September 2009



Considering the potential for the large scale spread of the highly contagious H1N1 virus in the upcoming months, the Logan County Health District is not performing tests on otherwise healthy individuals who come down with symptoms of the illness.

“There’s going to be lots of it around this season,” Health Commissioner Dr. Boyd Hoddinott said Tuesday. “We’re recommending that kids be sent home from school if they have flu symptoms.

“If we get a cluster of cases at a school, then we know that it’s H1N1.”

The health commissioner said testing is not necessary because doctors will treat swine flu symptoms — fever, cough, and sore throat, along with possible muscle aches and vomiting — the same regardless of whether a patient has an official H1N1 diagnosis.

“I know of private physicians who have done tests, which run about \$300, but this does not change the course of treatment.

“Testing is more for epidemiological purposes than for the patient’s benefit.”

An Indian Lake High School parent reported Tuesday that several students were being tested for H1N1 after being sent home with flu-like symptoms. ILHS Principal Denny Shaner said Tuesday afternoon that he did not know of any children being sent home with the flu that day, but understands that the potential for students being sickened with H1N1 may be inevitable.

“We know it’s going to hit here,” he said. “You hear it on the news every day.”

Dr. Hoddinott met with school administrators and principals over the past two weeks to pass along information about containing the spread of the illness. He recommended that teachers help remind students to cover their cough, to not share personal items like pencils and cell phones, and to wash their hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer frequently.

“This is going to be more like a marathon than a sprint with keeping this under control,” the health commissioner said.

“We’re taking extra precautionary steps like cleaning keyboards on computers, wiping down doorknobs and other areas that kids touch,” Mr. Shaner said. “We’re trying to be proactive instead of reactive.”

The illness is spread by direct person-to-person contact through droplets spread when someone coughs or sneezes, or via articles recently contaminated with nasopharyngeal secretions, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and LCHD materials.

Unless someone is seriously ill with H1N1, a visit to the doctor’s office is not necessary, Dr. Hoddinott said. Placing a phone call to the doctor’s office instead would lower the number of people exposed to the illness. Once the infected person is fever-free for a 24-hour period without the help of medication, then he or she should be able to return to school or the workplace.

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