Columbia County
Department of Health

Nancy A. Winch, R.N., M.S.
Public Health Director

325 Columbia Street Hudson, ● NY 12534 ● (518) 828-3358 ● Fax (518) 828-8472

OCTOBER 2, 2009
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COLUMBIA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS URGE LOCAL RESIDENTS TO HELP IN RESPONSE TO NOVEL H1N1 INFLUENZA VIRUS: DON'T SEEK HOSPITAL OR EMERGENCY ROOM TREATMENT UNLESS NECESSARY

As novel H1N1 influenza (swine flu) continues to spread in Columbia County, medical experts have advice for people experiencing flu-like illness, who wonder whether they should seek medical care.

"We realize that many people are concerned because of the number of cases of this new flu in our area and the fact that some people have died from flu," said Marge Costello, RN, BS, Public Health Nurse "That's understandable. It may help to know that for most individuals, novel H1N1 flu influenza will be no worse than the seasonal flu we are used to."

"Most people recover from seasonal or novel H1N1 flu without needing medical treatment." In fact, most flu patients can be cared for best at home.

Ms. Costello urged those who are NOT seriously ill to avoid hospital emergency departments, but instead contact their primary care doctor or health clinic.

"We're asking for everyone's help to make sure that emergency department treatment remains available for people who truly need it." "In addition to caring for people with severe novel H1N1 flu, local hospitals still have to manage their regular patient caseload."

When someone who does not actually have the flu or is mildly sick comes to a hospital emergency department:

- The individual could **GET** the flu from someone who is waiting there.
- The individual could **GIVE** the flu to others.
- The individual could **DELAY** important health care for seriously ill persons waiting to be treated.

Flu-like illness includes fever, chills, headache, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, tiredness, and sometimes diarrhea or vomiting.

When caring for individuals at home, give them medications such as acetaminophen to help reduce fever, and make sure they get rest and plenty of fluids. Individuals under age 19 should never be given aspirin to reduce pain or fever because it could cause a rare but potentially serious condition called Reye's Syndrome.

Individuals who are sick should stay at home until fever has disappeared for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

Some people should get medical care if they have the flu. People who have conditions that may result in more severe illness from influenza should call or see their health care provider if they have flu symptoms. These people include women who are pregnant, children younger than five, persons 65 and older, and persons of any age who have a medical condition such as diabetes, heart disease, or asthma. Their healthcare providers may decide to prescribe medications for the flu.

Flu patients who become dehydrated require medical intervention. Parents should be aware that children can become dehydrated in a short period of time. Things to be concerned about are dry mouth and tongue, lack of tears, dark circles or sunken eyes, decreased urine output and lethargy (extreme drowsiness or pronounced lack of interest in their surroundings). If these circumstances occur, call your healthcare provider. Get emergency care if your healthcare provider cannot be reached.

Call your doctor right away or get emergency care in the event of severe or worsening illness. In adults, the signs of severe or worsening illness are: rapid breathing, difficulty breathing; pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, bluish skin color, dizziness or confusion, increasing fever or severe persistent vomiting.

In children, the signs of severe or worsening illness include: increased fever, rash, rapid or difficult breathing, bluish skin color, irritability, lack of responsiveness (not waking up or not interacting) and not drinking enough fluids.

If you are caring for a household member at home who is sick with influenza, the most important ways to protect yourself and others who are not sick are to:

- Keep the sick person away from other people as much as possible.
- Remind the sick person to cover their cough, and frequently wash their hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub, especially after coughing and/or sneezing.
- Have everyone in the household clean their hands often, using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Ask your health care provider if household contacts of the sick person -- particularly those contacts who may be pregnant or have chronic health conditions -- should take antiviral medications to prevent the flu.

If you are in a group considered at high risk for complications from influenza, you should attempt to avoid close contact (within 6 feet) with household members who are sick with influenza. If close contact with a sick individual is unavoidable, consider wearing a facemask, if available.

More information on novel H1N1 influenza and taking care of an H1N1 flu patient at home is available at www.nyhealth.gov and www.cdc.gov. Additional information is also available at www.columbiacountyny.com