

October 16, 2009
Special Edition

nH1N1 Vaccine Update for LMHS Employees

For the past several months, we have all kept a close watch on the development of the novel H1N1 influenza virus, more commonly known as “swine flu.” We have not had to look far to see evidence that nH1N1 is present in our community.

We have diagnosed several cases within our facilities, and some of our own employees have contracted the virus. nH1N1 is not significantly more dangerous than the traditional influenza that we see each year. However, our bodies have not built up any kind of natural resistance to this new virus, making us all more susceptible.

Fortunately, the U.S. government has developed a vaccine for nH1N1. At the present time, the available supply of the vaccine cannot meet the demand, so the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention have developed a list of vaccination priority recommendations. As you might have guessed, health care workers are near the top of the priority list because we have a higher risk of being exposed to the virus, which means we could expose patients and co-workers.

LMHS has been able to secure a limited amount of the nH1N1 vaccine to administer to our employees, and we began vaccinating high-risk staff on Oct. 14, 2009. This vaccine will provide the highest level of safety for our patients and employees.

Therefore, **any** LMHS employee or volunteer who comes in face-to-face contact with patients, such as employed physicians, mid-levels and nurses, as well as caregivers/employees from Respiratory, Radiology, Physical Therapy, Transport, Food and Nutrition Services, Housekeeping, Plant Ops, Lee Physician Group, Case Management, Social Services and Q-Life, **must** comply with one of the two options below **once vaccine becomes available and has been offered to the employee:**

- Receive the nH1N1 vaccine when it becomes available through Employee Health or provide proof that you have received the nH1N1 vaccination from another source.

Or

- Wear a protective surgical-grade mask at all times while in face-to-face contact with patients. This includes employees who enter our facilities for even a short period of time, such as for a meeting, but who may have incidental face-to-face contact with a patient, such as in an elevator. If you have a medical condition that prevents you from receiving the vaccine, or if you have not received the vaccine for any other reason, you must wear a mask while on LMHS premises where patients are present.

This requirement will likely be in effect until springtime 2010, depending on the number of nH1N1 cases we see in Lee County during the coming months. Vaccine will be made available to employees who are less likely to have patient contact as the supply allows.

Given the dynamics of vaccine availability and the spread of nH1N1, these measures are fluid and subject to change depending on public health recommendations, disease frequency in the community and other factors.

If you are experiencing flu-like symptoms, you must be screened either in person by Employee Health, your physician or a walk-in medical center. If you are diagnosed with probable/possible nH1N1, your absences will be excused, and you can use available PTO or take unpaid time off until you recuperate. Your absences will also be excused if you have a family member experiencing flu-like symptoms, and you must stay home to help take care of that person.

I encourage you to talk to your direct supervisor if you have any questions or concerns, or for more information about taking time off if you or a family member should contract the virus.

I know that many of you are very concerned about the nH1N1 virus, and this communication is not meant to alarm you. We simply need to be prepared to look out for the best interests of our patients and our employees.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jim Nathan
President, Lee Memorial Health System