

Emergency Preparedness: Influenza A H1N1 Virus



Bristol Fire Rescue and Police emergency responders are closely monitoring the status of the current Influenza A H1N1 outbreak, commonly referred to as swine flu. The outbreak is now listed by the World Health Organization as a Phase 5 pandemic alert. Bristol Fire and Police departments have undertaken emergency preparedness assessments based upon guidelines promulgated by the Centers for Disease Control. Model N-95 respiratory masks have been placed on all emergency units which also carry latex gloves, eye protection, and sanitizing wipes.

Fire officials have altered guidelines for responding to patients with flu like symptoms and “we are frequently and regularly assessing and reviewing emergency response information that is disseminated by various public health agencies”, said Bristol Fire Chief Bob Barnes. The main route of transmission of the new influenza A(H1N1) virus seems to be similar to seasonal influenza, via droplets that are expelled by speaking, sneezing or coughing added Barnes. Assistant Fire Chief Jack Spurgeon, who also serves as the department’s Public Safety Education Officer, has visited area nursing homes and provided essential information for protecting one’s self from the virus. Spurgeon and Bristol Fire/Rescue offer the following advice for being prepared for the potential, local outbreak of the H1N1 virus.

You can prevent getting infected by avoiding close contact with people who show influenza-like symptoms (trying to maintain a distance of about 1 meter if possible) and taking the following measures:

- Avoid touching your mouth and nose;
- Clean hands thoroughly with soap and water, or cleanse them with an alcohol-based hand rub on a regular basis (especially if touching the mouth and nose, or surfaces that are potentially contaminated);
- Avoid close contact with people who might be ill;
- Reduce the time spent in crowded settings if possible;
- Improve airflow in your living space by opening windows;
- Practice good health habits including adequate sleep, eating nutritious food, and keeping physically active.

If you do not feel well, have high fever, cough or sore throat:

- Stay at home and keep away from work, school or crowds;
- Rest and take plenty of fluids;
- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing and, if using tissues, make sure you dispose of them carefully. Clean your hands immediately after with soap and water or cleanse them with an alcohol-based hand rub;
- If you do not have a tissue close by when you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth as much as possible with the crook of your elbow;
- Use a mask to help you contain the spread of droplets when you are around others, but be sure to do so correctly;
- Inform family and friends about your illness and try to avoid contact with other people;
- If possible, contact a health professional before traveling to a health facility to discuss whether a medical examination is necessary.

Bristol Fire/Rescue also suggests developing a family emergency plan which should include storing extra food, medicines, and other essential supplies. City officials will provide any additional information as it becomes available, or you may visit the Centers for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov. You may also address questions and seek additional information by contacting Assistant Fire Chief Jack Spurgeon, Jr. at (423)989-5701.