



County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION

Press Release

First Santa Cruz County Death from Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Flu

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A middle-aged Santa Cruz County woman has died at a local hospital after being hospitalized with the pandemic (H1N1) 2009 flu virus, Santa Cruz County Public Health Officer Poki Namkung, M.D. announced today. The death occurred July 7, 2009. She is the first person in Santa Cruz County to die from the pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus. The woman had underlying health conditions which may have put her at risk for severe H1N1 illness. Health officials will not be releasing the identity of the patient.

"We would like to convey our deepest sympathy to the family of this patient," Dr. Namkung said. "We know that H1N1 is present throughout our community, as it is throughout the nation. The vast majority of cases have mild or moderate illness, and the patients recover. Tragically, in this case, recovery did not occur," said Dr. Namkung.

This is the 24th person to die from pandemic (H1N1) 2009 flu in California, and there are 2,009 cases statewide based on data provided by the California Department of Public Health's H1N1 web site (as of July 2, 2009). As of July 9th, 35 cases have been identified as probable or have been confirmed in Santa Cruz County.

"Unfortunately," said Dr. Namkung, "we anticipate that there will be more deaths throughout the United States and California before this outbreak ends. Santa Cruz County is seeing a lot of flu activity for this time of the year, which is why everyone should continue taking steps to prevent catching the flu."

(Continued)

There is currently no vaccine available to protect against pandemic (H1N1) 2009 flu virus. The vaccine is in production and may be available by fall or early winter. It is important that county residents take the following precautions to help prevent the spread of the virus.

- Stay home when you are sick with flu-like symptoms (fever and cough or sore throat). This will prevent others from catching your illness. If you are sick, do not return to work or school until you or your child is well for at least 24 hours.
- Avoid close contact with others as much as possible (two arms lengths away).
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing, and always wash your hands afterwards or use alcohol-based hand cleaners.
- Wash your hands frequently.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

People experiencing flu-like symptoms should call their health care provider if they have severe symptoms, trouble breathing, are pregnant, or have underlying medical conditions such as asthma, chronic disease, or developmental difficulties. There is no need to go to an Emergency Room unless you have severe symptoms or trouble breathing.

The Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency (HSA) will process pandemic (H1N1) 2009 flu specimens from hospitalized patients with influenza like illness (ILI) and, on a case by case basis, may test persons associated with a cluster of ILI in a congregate living setting, such as a camp or skilled nursing facility. Community healthcare providers may test patients with ILI at their discretion and process the tests through their usual laboratory services, however, confirmatory testing at state or local public health labs will not be available unless the patients meet the above criteria.

For more information, please visit the website at www.santacruzhealth.org/swineflu or www.cdc.gov. Residents may also call the Health Services Agency information line at (831) 454-4343.

HSA is not permitted under current State and Federal Law to disclose the names or other personal identifying information of patients or individuals being treated or subject to communicable disease investigations conducted by the Public Health Department. We are allowed to release general information to the public and/or news media about the general status of communicable disease investigations or general information about the incidence of disease if any in Santa Cruz County, but may not release any information that might otherwise violate any individual's right to privacy.

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