

Rockdale News

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Swine flu case confirmed in Rockdale school staffer

One case of the H1N1 influenza, also known as the swine flu, was confirmed by public health authorities Aug. 25 in a staffer at Shoal Creek Elementary School.

Rockdale County Public Schools spokesperson Cindy Ball said the staff person was not a classroom teacher and had initially been taken to Rockdale Medical Center for treatment.

The incident makes the 10th case in Rockdale County confirmed this year by state public health authorities. Seven of those cases were reported within the last month, according to East Metro Health District spokesperson Vernon Goins, and the patients ranged in age from 2-years-old to 56-years-old. There were no swine flu fatalities reported in Rockdale County.

Superintendent Dr. Samuel King said Rockdale County Public Schools has been working closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and East Metro Health District, which includes Rockdale County, and is following CDC guidelines for prevention.

The school system, which has about 3,000 employees and 16,000 students, has been giving out information through letters, broadcast messages and the rapid communication system via phone on how to prevent the spread of the flu virus in general.

"Everything is geared towards prevention," said Ball. Some of those preventive measures include practicing good hygiene, such as coughing and sneezing into a tissue and then disposing of the tissue and washing hands with soap and water after coughing or sneezing, and practicing health etiquette, by coughing or sneezing away from other people. The schools have also been practicing social distancing, such as turning students' desks away from each other and towards the same direction, so that kids aren't facing one another.

If a students are found to have flu-like symptoms, faculty and staff members are instructed to send them to the school nurse for evaluation. The nurse then contacts the students' parents if they need to be sent home.

The CDC recommends those with a flu-like illness remain at home until at least 24 hours after their fever has gone away without the use of fever-reducing medication.

Rockdale Medical Center is also following CDC guidelines to and has a protocol for screening patients suspected to have a flu-like illness, said RMC spokesperson Marsha Terry.

"People should call their physicians or pediatricians before they come to the emergency room, unless symptoms are severe," advised Terry. She said the symptoms of swine flu were going to look much like regular flu symptoms - fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, vomiting.

The hospital also has face masks workers can wear if a patient is identified as having the flu and signs have been posted reminding people to practice good hygiene and etiquette. RMC is also discouraging unnecessary visiting to patients and prohibiting children in certain patient care areas. A special set of procedures are set up to accommodate visiting siblings of newborns the Birth Place.

"Stopping the spread of germs is going to make a difference," said Terry.

Superintendent King said "The next real key for us is once the vaccine comes in," adding that school systems will likely be a staging ground to administer the H1N1 flu vaccine to the younger population when it becomes available.

East Metro Health District spokesperson Vernon Goins said that the World Health Organization recommended that the most vulnerable patients, such as pregnant women those with compromised immune systems, receive the H1N1 vaccine first.

He said that the CDC reported the vaccine might be available sometime between mid-October to December. The public health department would be administering the vaccine on the local level. "Private doctors who want to dispense the flu shots should apply with East Metro Public Health by Sept. 15," he said.

The regular flu vaccine is available at public health departments for \$20 and is arriving at doctor's offices across the country. The Rockdale County Health Department, located at 985 Taylor Street in Conyers, can be contacted at 770-785-5936

Ball said the RCPS does offer the regular flu vaccine to employees.

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