

By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

Nebraska is among the majority of states now that have confirmed cases of H1N1 influenza, or the swine flu.

As of Wednesday this week, 38 states now have confirmed cases, with that number expected to grow.

A total of 642 cases have been confirmed including two deaths, both in Texas.

Last week at this time, there were 91 swine flu cases confirmed in 10 states.

The first case within Nebraska's borders was confirmed last Thursday, April 30, by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). That individual was from out-of-state and was visiting in Nebraska.

Since then, five other cases have been confirmed here, and on Wednesday morning, three new "probable" cases were reported.

Nebraska's confirmed cases so far are in Sarpy County (2) and one each in Pierce and Madison Counties. The two others were diagnosed in residents of California and Missouri, who were in Nebraska when confirmed.

Dr. Joann Schaefer, Chief Medical Officer for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), said those three "probables" (also in Madison and Sarpy Counties) are likely to be confirmed because 99 percent of cases sent to the CDC for testing are confirmed.

On Tuesday, the HHS began dividing up 64,700 treatment courses of antivirals to public health departments across Nebraska. They were packaged into apportioned lots based on population, and are being kept in a secure location.

The Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department in McCook is among the agencies to receive those state-issued antivirals if Schaefer decides to deploy them.

Health officials continue to caution people not be alarmed, but emphasize they should be responsible with their health and that of others.

Individuals who are moderately to severely ill with a cough, sore throat, fever and body aches (and perhaps vomiting and diarrhea) should call their physician for direction.

Guidelines to follow

These guidelines continue to be emphasized:

People who are sick should stay home from work or school to avoid spreading the virus.

Avoid close contact with people who are coughing or otherwise appear ill.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

Cover you mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.

Wash hands frequently.