

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

A total of 111 cases of H1N1, also known as swine flu, have been confirmed in Nebraska as of June 24. That includes a case in Hitchcock County last week, involving a person age 5-19.

In addition, Chase County Community Hospital Administrator Lola Jones said Tuesday that the Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department, which covers seven counties, including Hitchcock and Chase Counties, said a positive case was confirmed in this area this week.

"It's a little earlier than we expected it to come, but we are prepared," she said. Jones added that H1N1 is an influenza "that isn't any worse than any other flu, but the mode of transportation" is different.

H1N1 is spread through human to human contact and spreads rapidly, she said. Those with the flu are advised to use Tamiflu to lessen the effects.

Symptoms can include a fever of greater than 100 degrees, a sore throat, body aches and coughing. Diarrhea and vomiting can also be symptoms.

Jones said people with symptoms should have them checked by a doctor. Preliminary results are back in 15 minutes, she said, and tests are then sent for verification of H1N1 at the state level.

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services advises the public to 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 eyes, nose and mouth; cover mouth and nose with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing; and wash hands frequently.

Jones added that those with respiratory symptoms who visit the hospital or Chase County Clinic should wear a mask.

Jones said the Center for Disease Control (CDC) has announced that a vaccine is being produced, but won't be available until fall. The CDC recommends that all children be vaccinated first, Jones noted.

Dr. Jonathan Richman, Chief of Staff at CCCH, said a tabletop exercise will be conducted by area health agencies July 9 to review preparations in case of a pandemic flu. Such exercises have been held in the past, where a situation is presented and examined for problems or successes, without having to mount a field test.