

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

The first death of a Nebraska resident due to novel H1N1 influenza, commonly known as swine flu, was reported last week to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. The patient was a woman in her 50s who resided in Custer County.

DHHS said the woman had several chronic, underlying health conditions, such as heart disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

“Her loss is a tragedy, and my condolences go out to her loved ones. Any death from influenza is profoundly sad,” said Dr. Joann Schaefer, Chief Medical Officer.

“Unfortunately, from the beginning we knew there would be deaths from this illness in Nebraska, based on the fact that there have been deaths in other parts of the United States and Mexico,” she said.

DHHA has had 264 cases of H1N1 reported in Nebraska. Thirteen people have been hospitalized.

Myra Stoney of Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department said Tuesday that there have been three confirmed cases of H1N1 in the SWNPHD’s eight-county area.

One of those was treated at Chase County Clinic about three weeks ago. Chase County Community Hospital Chief of Staff Dr. Jonathan Richman said the person doesn’t reside in Chase County.

H1N1 seems to be affecting the younger age groups in the U.S. and Nebraska, particularly those ages five to 24. In Nebraska, the average age is 20. Only 17 cases have been over age 50.

Health officials agree that H1N1 hasn’t begun to peak in Nebraska yet. That means that vigilance is necessary.

Most people who get H1N1 recover on their own without additional treatment.

People moderately to severely ill with a cough or sore throat and a fever over 100 degrees, especially with underlying medical conditions, should contact their physician.

“It is clear from our data that this virus is within the community, meaning most cases have no travel history or identified source of exposure,” Dr. Schaefer said.

A physician may prescribe an antiviral, which can lessen the symptoms and possibly shorten the duration of the illness. People who are sick should stay home from work or school.

Additional symptoms of H1N1 are body aches and sometimes may include vomiting and diarrhea.

Preparedness meeting

The Chase County Preparedness Coordination Committee (CPCC) has scheduled a planning meeting for this coming Monday at Chase County Community Hospital to discuss preparedness for the possibility of a more virulent strain of the H1N1 virus this fall.

Attending the meeting, according to Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department Emergency Response Coordinator Heidi Wheeler, will be representatives of area clergy, medical, fire, Emergency Medical Services, media, veterinarians, public health and emergency services.

“This (H1N1) is not dying down any,” Wheeler said. “Hopefully, we’ll get people on board” to plan for a pandemic influenza because of the recent events with the outbreak.

The group will meet at 6:30 p.m. at CCCH. The committee is charged with updating the

infrastructure for area communities, developing a plan for containment of a disease, determining steps for distribution of scarce vaccine, antivirals and personal protective equipment, and updating response plans.