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H1N1 (Swine) Flu

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H1N1 Swine Flu Influenza A (Swine Flu), originating in Mexico, has now spread to several countries. The first transmission was from pigs to pigs and then to humans, but it is now spread person-to-person through infected droplets. Renaming the Swine Flu is mostly a political move to stop the slaughter of thousands of pigs. You cannot get H1N1 from eating pork.

WHO has raised the alert level to a Level 5 (impending pandemic). The increase in reported cases each day is being followed by the CDC. An interesting feature of the disease is that it seems to strike children and young adults and the disease is much less severe than that occurring in Mexico. There are only speculative theories for now of why this is occurring. The media, as is typical, blows things out of proportion to have a big story to tell. The lay public gets information that makes them scared.

Be proactive, be prepared, and be protected - wash your hands, cover your cough with a tissue, or your sleeve if necessary, and avoid contact with persons who are ill, if at all possible. If you develop flu-like symptoms (muscle aches, cough, runny nose and a temperature above 100 degrees F), stay at home and call your healthcare provider.

Travel to Mexico should be delayed, especially to areas where the flu is more prevalent, such as Mexico City. It would be prudent to avoid large gatherings until further notice from Public Health and CDC.

There are antiviral medications that can reduce the virus's ability to multiply; Tamiflu and Relenza are currently being recommended. It is important to take these medications early. There is no vaccine available at this time. It may take up to six months to manufacture and distribute a new vaccine. The flu vaccine that was given last fall will not protect you from this new virus.

We will update this article weekly, but for more (and quicker) information, go to the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>. As of May 3, there were 23 probable cases in King County. The Public Health Dept. reports that the H1N1 strain appears to be no more severe than the flu seen in a typical flu season. They have established a Flu Hotline for the public at 877-903-KING, staffed Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm.