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San Bernardino County Health Officer Announces First Death from Novel Influenza A H1N1

SAN BERNARDINO – San Bernardino County Health Officer Maxwell Ohikhuare, M.D., announced the county’s first death of an individual confirmed to be infected with novel influenza A H1N1. The virus was previously known as “swine flu.” The deceased was a middle-aged man who had serious pre-existing medical conditions including heart disease, pneumonia and obesity. This is the first death in California related to the virus.

“Our hearts and sympathies go out to the victim’s family,” Ohikhuare said. “His death is a sad reminder of how significantly this flu can impact people who have chronic illnesses.” Because this is a new virus, most people will not have immunity to it, and illness may be more widespread and severe as a result. “Most cases have been mild, and we have seen fewer infections now since the virus spreads in a similar way to seasonal flu,” noted Ohikhuare.

There have been 114 confirmed and probable cases of illness from novel influenza A H1N1 in San Bernardino County. Currently, there is no vaccine to protect against H1N1, which combines swine, human and bird viruses. It is spread from person to person like the seasonal flu, but there are actions people can take to help prevent the spread of germs:

- Cough and sneeze into a tissue or into your elbow.
• Wash your hands often with soap and water and use hand sanitizer.
• Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
• Avoid close contact with sick people.
• Avoid attendance at large gatherings.
• Practice good emergency preparedness by storing a two-week supply of food, water, and medication. Get a list of items at: http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/individual/checklist.html .

People experiencing flu-like symptoms should stay home from work or school, limit contact with others and call their healthcare provider. Those who are ill with flu-like symptoms, but do not have healthcare coverage, should seek care through Family Health Centers in Fontana or San Bernardino by calling (909) 422-8029.

The San Bernardino County Department of Public Health is coordinating with state and federal agencies in conducting flu surveillance and implementing measures to lessen the impact of the flu virus. Ohikhuare advised residents to monitor news reports and check the San Bernardino County Web site at www.sbcounty.gov/dph or www.bepreparedcalifornia.ca.gov for additional information.

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