

Twin Falls Times News, Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2009 – by Ben Botkin

## St. Luke's takes precautions in H1N1 flu season

St. Luke's Magic Valley Medical Center has changed some of its visitation policies in a move intended to safeguard against the spread of the H1N1 flu.

The changes affect the neonatal intensive care unit and the pediatric unit for the Twin Falls hospital. While the hospital typically changes its visiting policies when flu season arrives, H1N1 flu made the changes come earlier in the year, said Trish Heath, infection prevention nurse for St. Luke's Magic Valley. "This is something we normally do but we're doing it sooner and more restrictive," Heath said.

At the neonatal unit, visitors will be limited to parents and guardians responsible for the child. As a result, people under 18 are not allowed in that unit unless they are a parent or guardian. The change also means that other family members such as grandparents or siblings cannot visit the neonatal unit.

"Children are one of the incubators for H1N1 because they're at the highest risk," Heath said.

In the pediatric unit, all visitors must be 18 or older. In the past, when visiting rules were changed for seasonal flu, the minimum age was 14.

Heath said the hospital has worked with parents and provided advance notice about the visiting policies so they can plan ahead. Typically, the hospital has no age restrictions for visitors before flu season arrives. Usually, the visiting policy changes for flu season go into effect in mid-October to mid-November. "The H1N1 flu has just upped the ante," Heath said, adding that the hospital will continue to monitor the situation.

The hospital also said that people presenting flulike symptoms should stay away from hospital units they aren't being treated in.

Other hospitals in Idaho have changed visiting policies too. St. Luke's Boise/Meridian Medical Centers and Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center in Boise have placed similar rules in place requiring that visitors in the newborn intensive care unit and pediatric units be above 18 years old.