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## Flu leads hospital to tweak policy

POCATELLO — In response to the presence of the H1N1 flu virus in Bannock County, Portneuf Medical Center has “adjusted” its visitation policy, including a reduction in the number of visitors allowed and an age restriction. The hospital is also asking those who are feeling ill or symptomatic to refrain from visiting patients.

“It’s a precautionary measure,” said Brad Huerta, PMC’s director of public affairs. “The (Southeastern District Health Department) has already indicated we have had cases of H1N1 in Bannock County, so we are doing this to protect our patients and our employees.”

According to a release from PMC, patients are now limited to two visitors at a time and all visitors must be 18 years or older. Visitors must also be immediate family members.

“Visitors who feel they have been exposed to the virus, and are still symptomatic are strongly encouraged to postpone their visits,” the release said.

Visiting hours at PMC, which run noon to 8:30 p.m., will not change with the adjusted policy. Huerta said in addition to the adjusted visiting policy, PMC has posted information about the H1N1 virus and measures that can be taken to avoid contracting the disease throughout the hospital, including all entry points. “We are trying to alert people to the ways they can protect themselves,” he said.

The H1N1 virus, commonly referred to as the swine flu, first started making news this spring with a major outbreak in Mexico. By June, the World Health Organization labeled it a pandemic.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control’s map gauging the spread of the virus shows that Idaho is one of 37 states where H1N1 is considered to be widespread.

PMC appears to be at the forefront among regional medical centers in making visitation changes in response to the H1N1 presence.

Jacklyn Taylor, a spokeswoman for Harms Memorial Hospital in American Falls, said that facility hasn’t adjusted its visiting policy, but is much more attentive to the policy already in place.

“Basically we are sticking to the same policy we have always had,” she said. “If someone is not feeling well or is visibly ill, then we ask they don’t visit patients in the nursing home or the hospital.”

Harms has a 10-bed hospital and a 31-bed nursing home. Taylor said employees at the hospital are providing a lot more education these days about what people can do to protect themselves from the virus.

She said Harms has been doing some testing for H1N1. “But I am not aware of anyone testing positive having some through our facility,” Taylor said.

Calls to Bingham Memorial seeking comment were not returned before deadline.