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Hospitals: Don't flood Ers

Experts say many with flu symptoms should avoid doctor visits unless they develop serious symptoms

CANYON COUNTY — Mercy Medical Center, Southwest District Health and West Valley Medical Center officials strongly encourage people to stay home if they are ill with mild to moderate flu-like symptoms.

Doctors stressed that flu sufferers should visit their medical provider or the emergency department only if they have severe complications or underlying health conditions such as pregnancy, asthma, diabetes, heart or lung disease or other conditions that weaken the immune system.

“We are seeing an increase of approximately 25 to 50 patients daily that do not require emergency treatment, which in turn, results in delays or longer wait times for those patients who really need emergency care,” Clint Child, vice president of patient care at Mercy Medical Center, said Thursday in a prepared statement.

Officials at the health district and two Canyon County hospitals agree the flu can be a serious disease, especially for those with certain medical conditions. But for most healthy people, they said, rest and recovery at home is the best treatment. That approach frees up hospital space for those who have serious symptoms and helps contain the spread of the disease. Local hospitals also want families and friends of patients to restrict their visits.

“We have gone even further to protect our patients and ask that if you are sick, please do not visit patients at the hospital,” said Ginna Maggard, infection prevention and employee health staff member for West Valley Medical Center in Caldwell.

Maggard said West Valley, in addition to encouraging good hygiene practices, is not letting anyone 14 years old and younger visit patients and is limiting visitors to two at a time.

The Central District Health Department has also asked employers and schools to forego requirements that employees or students get a doctor's note for absences related to flu-liked symptoms.

The symptoms of H1N1 flu are similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal influenza and include fever, body aches, lack of energy, lack of appetite, headache, fatigue and coughing. Some people with H1N1 flu also have reported runny or stuffy noses, sore throats, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Most people who suffer from the seasonal flu or novel H1N1 flu (swine flu), are reporting mild to moderate symptoms that recover with common-sense practices at home without needing medical care, health officials say.