

LOCALNEWS

Officials: Precautions will help avoid spread of viruses, flu

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While enterovirus D68 may be making news headlines, just one case has been diagnosed this season in Minnesota.

But that doesn't mean people shouldn't continue to take precautions to stay healthy, say local health officials.

Dr. Anthony Stone said enterovirus are common viruses that physicians see each year. He said they are generally associated with symptoms similar to the common cold, viral upper respiratory illnesses, and even the flu, and commonly occur in the summer and fall. The virus can bring mild respiratory symptoms such as cough, sneezing, runny nose, fever, aches and pains.

"There do seem to be some who are having more severe symptoms such as respiratory difficulties with wheezing and shortness of breath," he said. "I think this is what is generating the media attention."

Nancy Lee, health educator with the Koochiching County Health and Human Services Department, said a number of diseases are caused by enterovirus, including polio; hand, foot and mouth disease; and respiratory diseases.

Lee said non-polio enteroviruses are very common and cause each year from 10 million to 15 million infections in the United States. But she and Stone said D68 is not a reportable disease to the Minnesota Department of Health so it may not be known if there are local cases or other cases in the state.

Stone said there is often an increased level of concern when something seems new



FILE PHOTO

Standard precautions and the flu shot may protect people from enterovirus D68 and other illnesses this season.

and appears to be infecting children. "Children and teens seem to be most commonly affected likely because they have not been exposed to this particular strain in the past and thus have not formed immunity," he said, adding D68 is not new.

Stone encouraged people to view D68 as another respiratory infection which should be largely preventable and easily treated. He urged people to get plenty of rest and fluids, take fever reducers and cough and cold medications if children are over the age of 6 if they believe they have the virus.

Media attention about D68 helps people be informed about the virus, said Lee. "Education on what is happening around a health issue gives people the ability to be aware/informed and seek medical attention if they feel the need," she said.

In an effort to slow the spread of viruses, Stone encouraged parents to not send to school children with fevers or significant respiratory symptoms.

Sue Palm, school nurse at Independent School District 361, also urged parents to keep their sick kids home from school if they have

symptoms. If in doubt, keep them out of school, she said of people who may wonder if their child has D68 or some other illness. A rule of thumb is to keep a child home for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone without fever-reducing medications, she said.

"The big thing is to check temperatures," she said. "If they have a cough, a temp of over 100 — that would be a reason to stay home."

Palm also urged parents to make sure their children know how to properly wash their hands — 20 seconds of rubbing with soap and water, then rinsing.

Hand sanitizer isn't as effective as hand washing, she said.

Each child who comes to the school nurse office is evaluated, with temperatures taken, she said. If a child has a temperature more than 100, they are sent home.

Stone said people with asthma who experience symptoms should stick to their usual medications and treatment plan, but be more aware of their breathing issues.

And while most people won't need treatment to recover, he urged anyone with symptoms that do not im-

prove in a week, seem to be worsening, or have new wheezing or trouble breathing, to seek medial attention.

Standard precautions

Stone and Lee said the same precautions against the flu and colds should continue to be practiced to protect against enterovirus.

Stone urged people to continue using standard precautions, such as "frequent hand washing, especially before eating, keeping your hands away from your face and not sharing utensils, drinks or kissing infected persons," said Stone.

With no vaccine or treatment for D68, Lee said key is prevention. "Enterovirus D68 and influenza are both respiratory illnesses," said Lee. "Getting your flu shot can at least help protect you from one of them."

Stone said the standard precautions are useful because this and many other viruses are spread through the respiratory secretions — coughing, saliva or nasal secretions. "Simple measures can go a long way in preventing the spread of D68 and most viruses," he said.

Lee, too, urged people to use the standard precautions and also to sneeze and cough into the crook of their elbow to contain any secretions, to avoid close contact with people who appear ill, and to stay at home when they feel sick.

And while Palm said Tuesday the concern about enterovirus D68 has lessened in the last week, she said flu and cold season is nearing and the same precautions should be used.

Littlefork City Council mulls larger project

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The Littlefork City Council Thursday reviewed a rough estimate for a water/sewer project city officials hope to undertake in 2015.

John Mattonen of JPJ Engineering sent a rough cost estimate to the council for the project, which at its biggest scope would include improvements to more than 15,000 feet of water mains, more than 10,000 feet of sewer lines, and 2.5 miles of street improvements. With those improvements, the rough project cost is \$6 million, city Administrator Sonja Pelland said.

"Now the council has to decide if that's the way they want to proceed," Pelland said.

The city will clean sewer lines over the winter, Pelland said, which will also

give city officials an indication of whether the lines need to be replaced. The council may order the lines cleaned and decide there's nothing wrong with them, she said, and they don't need to be replaced.

In other business, the council approved resolutions condemning two buildings which had been inspected by Kelly Meyers. The building owned by Becky Belanger at 310 Main Street in Littlefork can still be repaired, following a timeline the council set, Pelland said. The other resolution refers to trailers in Nelson's Trailer Court, which need to be removed, she said.

The council set the date of the Truth-in-Taxation hearing at 5 p.m. Dec. 18, when the council will allow citizens an opportunity to weigh in on the proposed tax levy for 2015.

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