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May 5, 2009

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Communities urged to take protective measures

Although there has not been a confirmed case of H1N1 (swine) flu in Sarasota County to date, Sarasota County health officials are urging everyone to take the necessary precautions.

"We must all do our part to reduce the spread of this infection," said Scott Pritchard, epidemiologist for Sarasota County Health Department. "Everyone is encouraged to get prepared at home, find out about plans at your job, and take steps to protect yourself, your family and the community."

Pritchard said the Sarasota County Health Department, along with its community partners has a response plan and has put it into play. "Use the same judgment you would use during a typical flu season."

The H1N1 (swine) flu infection can spread from person to person, therefore everyone is encouraged to:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or use the inside of your elbow.
- Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Avoid close contact with people who are coughing or otherwise appear ill.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Wash hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand cleaners to reduce the spread of respiratory illness.
- People with a cough, fever and fatigue, possibly along with diarrhea and vomiting, should contact their health care provider.

If you think you have influenza, please call your health care provider and discuss whether you need to be seen in their office or emergency department or stay home.

For more information, visit www.sarasotahealth.org. For flu information in Sarasota County, you may call the Flu Information Line at 941-861-2800. For further information in Florida, call toll-free, 1-800-342-3557, or the State of Florida TDD at 1-800- 226-4329. If you do not have computer access, visit a health kiosk located at libraries and Senior Friendship Centers throughout Sarasota County.