

**Emergency Medical Services Agency**

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**Public Health Department**

Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System



September 24, 2009

To: All Santa Clara County Fire Departments  
All Santa Clara County Ambulance Provider Agencies  
All Santa Clara County Prehospital Personnel

From: Josh Davies  
Interim EMS Division Manager

Handwritten signature of Josh Davies in black ink.

David Ghilarducci, MD  
EMS Medical Director

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Subject: Seasonal Flu and Pandemic Influenza information for Prehospital Provider Agencies and prehospital personnel

Definitions:

**Pandemic Flu:** Pandemic influenza is a worldwide outbreak caused by a new flu virus. The virus spreads easily, and since this is a new flu virus, people have little or no immunity – or protection- against it. In the past, pandemic influenza has caused widespread illness and death. Flu viruses are known to change as they move through the population. Scientists and health professionals are concerned that this new pandemic H1N1 flu virus could mutate and cause more severe illness and death. Even if this does not happen we expect there will be large numbers of sick people, which could overwhelm community resources.

**Seasonal Flu:** Seasonal flu outbreaks are caused by viruses that have been in communities before. Seasonal flu happens every year, usually during the winter months,

**H1N1 (Swine) Flu:** In April 2009, a new virus called novel H1N1 influenza (early on called the “swine flu”) started making people ill. The H1N1 flu spread from person-to-person, much the same way that regular seasonal flu viruses spread, now the new flu virus is called pandemic H1N1.

**Symptoms of Influenza:** The symptoms of seasonal influenza and pandemic H1N1 flu are similar and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Many people with the pandemic H1N1 flu, especially children, also have diarrhea and vomiting.

***Dedicated to the health of the whole community***

*The Public Health Department is a division of Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System, owned and operated by the County of Santa Clara.*

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In preparation for the Seasonal Flu and H1N1 flu event there are a number of things that should be done by EMS provider agencies and personnel to ensure their own all wellness and promote infection control and limit the spread of flu virus during patient encounters.

**Prehospital Provider Agencies:** All prehospital provider agencies should assess their levels of supplies (N-95 masks etc.) and order additional supplies early.

All prehospital provider agencies should review their surge and volume overload procedures with their personnel.

**Prehospital Personnel Wellness:**

- All prehospital personnel should avail themselves of the seasonal flu vaccine when available.
- All prehospital care provider agencies should register to receive the H1N1 vaccine
- All prehospital personnel should avail themselves of the H1N1 Influenza vaccine when available.

**Public awareness campaign:** Paramedics and EMT's are encouraged to give out the Preparing for Pandemic Flu pamphlet that has been developed by the Public Health Department, available for download at [www.sccphd.org](http://www.sccphd.org). and then click on the Pandemic Influenza link on the right side of the page) during patient encounters when appropriate

Educational posters (Cover Your Cough and Wash You Hands) are available from Santa Clara County through [www.sccphd.org](http://www.sccphd.org).

As often as possible the public should hear the prevention message concerning "cover your cough" and good hand washing practices.

**Prehospital practice considerations:** All prehospital personnel should prepare for the implementation of MPDS Card 36 which will use appropriate questioning of the caller to determine if the problem is one of Influenza-Like Illness (ILI) or some other medical issue.

- MPDS Card 36 provides for changes in dispatch criteria during escalation of the declared event.
- Depending on the event escalation level, patients with ILI symptoms only **may** not be transported to a hospital at all.

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All EMT's and paramedics should practice exposure precautions and use common sense and practical measures to prevent self infection and limit spread of the virus during the pandemic.

Precautions to limit exposure include the following:

- a. Limit the number of responders that work in close contact with patients as appropriate.
- b. All prehospital personnel should wear PPE appropriate to the situation.
- c. If the patient (or family member, affiliated bystander) is exhibiting signs or symptoms of influenza like illness (ILI), a simple surgical mask should be applied to that patient/person prior to an assessment.
- d. If a patient is exhibiting ILI symptoms, that patient should be transported with a mask on if other symptoms indicate the need for transportation to the emergency department.
- e. Hand washing or use of hand sanitizers during and after each patient contact is required of all prehospital personnel.