

## County's first H1N1 flu case confirmed

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson  
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THIS STORY HAS BEEN UPDATED.

LAKE COUNTY & Health officials are reporting that they've confirmed the first case of the H1N1 influenza & known more commonly as swine flu & in Lake County.

Lake County Health Officer Dr. Karen Tait reported Monday that the case involved a 39-year-old woman who developed symptoms on June 20.

The woman, whose identity and area of residence in the county were not released, is recovering and did not require hospitalization, said Tait.

Tait said the woman's symptoms included fever, a cough and vomiting. The diagnosis was confirmed through a test Lake County Public Health helped facilitate at the Sonoma County Public Health Laboratory.

About a week before her symptoms appeared, the woman had visited family in another county, said Tait.

&quot;It's kind of widespread in California right now, so it's not too surprising,&quot; Tait said.

The H1N1 virus began to raise concerns earlier this spring when hundreds of cases were reported in Mexico, eventually spreading to the United States.

As of Monday, the Centers for Disease Control reported that 70 countries are reporting human cases of the virus.

On June 11, the World Health Organization raised its worldwide pandemic alert to Phase 6, indicating that a global pandemic is under way.

California had 1,519 cases of confirmed and probable H1N1 influenza as of June 25, with 142 requiring hospitalization and 17 resulting in death, Tait reported.

Nationwide, 27,717 cases and 127 deaths have been reported, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Tait said health care providers were expecting the H1N1 virus to calm down over the summer months, much like the seasonal flu.

&quot;But then surveillance around the state showed it starting to pick up in the last three weeks,&quot; she said, noting that Sonoma County has recently reported several confirmed cases.

That H1N1 has a propensity for spreading in the summer is proving to be one of the virus' unpredictable aspects, said Tait, which arises largely because the virus is very new.

With a new virus, Tait said, people can be easily infected once exposed because they don't have antibodies from similar flu infections to protect them. When the immune system encounters the virus for the first time, it has to develop a reaction from scratch, rather than waking up old antibodies that have experience with it.

The severity of the illness, she noted, resembles the ordinary seasonal flu, and has so far been mild enough that people can be treated at home.

However, it also can be severe & just like seasonal influenza & and there are occasional deaths as a result. Tait said she believes there probably have been other H1N1 cases in Lake County, but the identification process involves specialized laboratory testing done only on a limited basis to help officials track the virus' outbreak.

Because of that limited testing, Tait said statistics underestimate the actual number of cases.

When Public Health gets a call from a medical provider about a suspect case, the agency facilitates getting a testing sample to a laboratory, as in the case of the local flu sufferer, said Tait.

&quot;I was eager to do some testing because I felt that we probably did have cases out there that we hadn't yet confirmed,&quot; she said. &quot;We thought it was there, now we know that it's here.&quot;

Once H1N1 is found in a community, Tait said cases will be diagnosed based on symptoms, not lab testing. Lab testing currently is being done on hospitalized patients, which Tait said emphasizes the number of more severely ill patients.

Tait said Lake County Public Health is working with health providers and others to monitor local influenza activity, which has not so far shown the increases observed in nearby counties, which she suggested may be because of Lake County's relatively sparse population and outdoor lifestyle.

An H1N1 influenza A vaccine currently is under development. Tait said it likely will be available this fall.

In the mean time, health officials urge people to take basic precautions this summer and into the regular health season in order to stay healthy & including regular hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, and staying home when ill.

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