

News Release

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Why is My Nurse Wearing a Mask?

Masks another tool in battle against disease spread

As the 2009 H1N1 and seasonal influenza seasons progress this fall and winter, you may see more individuals, especially health care workers, wearing protective masks. Does this mean the H1N1 virus is becoming stronger? Should you be wearing a mask? Is it dangerous to go out in public without a mask? These are among the many questions raised by Mills County residents.

“Although seeing a health care worker wearing a protective mask can be startling, it should actually provide you with a level of comfort,” said Sheri Bowen, Agency Administrator at Mills Co. Public Health. “It’s a sign your health care provider is protecting themselves from the H1N1 virus, and in turn, protecting their patients.”

Masks help decrease the spread of influenza in your health care provider’s office, and so you may be asked to wear one to if you are coughing or sneezing. “If you’re coughing or sneezing, wearing a mask while you wait to be seen by a health care provider is a thoughtful action you can personally take to stop the spread of disease,” said Bowen. If your health care provider wears a mask, it does not mean they are concerned about attending patients. Instead, it is a sign the worker is taking extra steps to stop the spread of the virus to themselves, and the patients they see each day.

“Additionally, we know some employers are asking their workers to be checked by a doctor if they are going to be off work for several days, or before they return to work after illness. Since it is important to keep hospitals, ERs and clinics available to the sickest people, it would be helpful to forgo that practice this flu season,” said Bowen. “We are hearing that some offices are already overwhelmed with ill patients.”

Local information about H1N1 Vaccine availability can be found on the Mills Co. Public Health website, www.mcph.millscoia.us or by calling Public Health at 527-9699. A statewide toll-free hotline has been established for public questions about seasonal and H1N1 influenza at 1-800-447-1985. More information can also be found at www.idph.state.ia.us.

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