

News Release

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Minnesota FluLine to offer support and treatment options for people with possible symptoms of influenza **Minnesotans with flu symptoms can call toll-free line at 1-866-259-4655**

A new phone-based service is now available for Minnesotans who think they may have the flu.

Beginning today, people with possible flu symptoms can call the Minnesota FluLine (MN FluLine) at 1-866-259-4655 for information and treatment options. Professionals will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. People with limited English skills will be connected with an interpreter. There is no charge for the call.

Callers with flu symptoms will be connected with a participating nurse at MN FluLine, or a nurse at a triage line operated by their own provider network or health plan. The nurses will evaluate the health concerns of callers and discuss treatment options, using consistent criteria to determine which treatment option is most appropriate for each individual.

Possible treatment options can include rest and fluids at home, a prescription for an antiviral medication, or medical evaluation in a clinic or hospital.

FluLine was developed in response to the first global influenza pandemic in over 40 years. Officials are concerned that the pandemic could overwhelm the health care system, and they believe that FluLine can reduce some of the demands on the system.

FluLine is also expected to help decrease the spread of the flu. By providing assistance over the phone, the new service is expected to limit the number of potentially infectious people who gather in emergency rooms, urgent care centers and clinics.

"We have been concerned that this flu season could place a huge burden on our health care system," said Dr. Sanne Magnan, Minnesota Commissioner of Health. "By providing support and treatment options to people over the phone, we hope this new service will allow our health care providers and facilities to focus on those people who most need their attention."

MN FluLine is the first influenza triage line in the country providing statewide reach and the option of prescribing anti-virals drugs under standing orders from a physician. It is a unique public-private partnership involving the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), the Minnesota Hospital Association, the Minnesota Council of Health Plans, health care providers, local health departments, and the Children's Physician Network (CPN). CPN is responsible for the actual operation of FluLine. The service was developed with input and advice from a number of other partners, including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"This unprecedented collaboration means that Minnesotans with flu-like symptoms have another tool in their tool kit to fight the flu – a place to have questions answered about their illness and be evaluated for possible treatment," said Dr. Aaron DeVries, medical epidemiologist at MDH. "We're grateful to have the support of so many partners in making the FluLine available to the people of our state."

The Minnesota FluLine was created specifically to meet the needs of people with possible symptoms of the flu. By definition, those symptoms include a fever of 100 degrees or more, along with a cough or sore throat. Flu symptoms can also include runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and/or fatigue. In some cases, symptoms of novel H1N1 influenza can also include vomiting and diarrhea in addition to respiratory symptoms.

In most cases, people can recover from the flu at home without needing to visit a health care provider. Those who may be at highest risk for complications from the flu include children under two years of age, people 65 years of age or older, pregnant women, and people with underlying medical conditions.

Health officials continue to emphasize prevention measures as the first line of defense against the flu: stay home if you're sick with a flu-like illness, cover your coughs and sneezes with a sleeve or a tissue, and wash your hands frequently.

For most people, staying home when they are sick means staying home from work or school, and avoiding other locations where they could expose others to the flu, until at least 24 hours after their fever resolves, without the aid of medications like acetaminophen or ibuprofen. People are being encouraged to get vaccinated now against seasonal flu, and get the H1N1 vaccine as it becomes available. The H1N1 vaccine will be an extremely valuable tool for preventing infection.

People who need information about the flu, but do not have symptoms, are encouraged to visit the flu information page on the MDH Web site at www.mdhflu.com. The Web site offers a wide range of information and resources, including an interactive flu shot clinic finder.