

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, September 11, 2009

Upstate Hospitals join together to restrict visitation as precaution against spread of flu



Sept. 11, 2009 – Today, seven Upstate health systems jointly announce restrictions to their visitation policies as a precaution against the spread of H1N1 influenza.



Currently and until the flu incidence rate has significantly decreased, these new guidelines apply to patient visits by children under age 18. Collaborating in this effort are: AnMed Health; Bon Secours St. Francis Health System; Cannon Memorial Hospital; Greenville Hospital System University Medical Center; Oconee Medical Center; Palmetto Health Baptist Easley; and Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System.



Officials at each of the health systems are asking the Upstate residents for full support in refraining children from visiting hospital patients based on the following:



1) **Of H1N1 flu cases reported in the Upstate, a very high ratio has been in children and young adults up to 24 years of age; thus allowing this age group to visit in hospital patient areas presents potentially critical risks to patients; and**



2) **because the under-18 age population has been determined to be more susceptible to this particular strain of flu (H1N1), visiting in a hospital also significantly increases the child's own risk for contracting flu.**



All of the hospitals recognize that these actions may cause some disruption to families but emphasize that their first priority is ensuring the safest possible environment for patients and diminishing potential exposure to the flu.

Families who encounter special situations (for example: visitation to a gravely ill patient) are asked to contact a nursing supervisor or patient relations representative at that particular hospital to ensure that safety protocols are followed for the protection of patients as well as the visiting child.

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Dr. Rick Foster, Senior VP of Quality and Patient Safety of the South Carolina Hospital Association (SCHA), commends Upstate hospitals for taking this important step together to minimize the spread of the H1N1 influenza virus in the hospital setting.

“This type of collaborative pandemic influenza prevention effort, as demonstrated by hospitals across the Upstate, will be critical to minimizing the spread of and loss of life from the H1N1 virus in South Carolina,” said Foster.

This strain of H1N1, while very infectious, appears to be no more dangerous than seasonal flu for most people. However, pregnant women, children and those who are immuno-compromised or have chronic medical conditions appear to be particularly at risk for developing complications.

Healthcare officials encourage those who think they may have H1N1 flu to contact a primary care physician for appropriate advice on medical care; many cases of H1N1 may be cared for at home using over-the-counter medication to provide symptomatic relief. As always, any adult with mild flu-like illness (fever, cough, sore throat, head/body aches) is asked to not visit in the hospital.

Anyone experiencing one or more of the following severe symptoms should immediately seek medical treatment:

- high fevers
- breathing difficulties
- asthma symptoms that are progressively becoming worse
- severe nausea
- vomiting or diarrhea

State health officials and SCHA are actively working with hospitals and health professionals statewide to implement a comprehensive pandemic influenza preparedness and response plan that will include specific hospital visitation policies and procedures, along with other measures like mass vaccination, proper hand hygiene and use of protective masks and gloves in high risk settings.

Flu vaccines specifically targeting H1N1 are expected to be available this fall according to the CDC.

All hospitals are advising the public to follow safe hygiene practices and protect themselves by washing hands often or using a hand sanitizer of at least 60% percent alcohol.

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IMPORTANT MEDIA NOTES – see following page...

Media are encouraged to contact their local hospital public information officers for assistance in locating interview sources – see following list for all PIO Contact information.

AnMed Health, Kari Lutz, 864/512-1027, kari.lutz@anmedhealth.org

Bon Secours St. Francis Health System, 864/449-6370, lee_turza@bshsi.org

Cannon Memorial Hospital, Amanda Dow, 864/898.1252, adow@cmhsc.org

Greenville Hospital System University Medical Center, Karen Gecewich, 864/455-5480 (O), 864/449-6659 (C), kgecewich@ghs.org

Oconee Medical Center, Heather Goss, (864) 885-7904, heather.goss@oconeemed.org

Palmetto Health Baptist Easley, Tammie C. Epps, 803/434-4903 (O), 803/318-1598 (C), Tammie.Epps@PalmettoHealth.org

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