

Nation's Emergency Physicians and Nurses Issue Joint Statement About Swine Flu As People Seek Information and Reassurance in Emergency Departments

*If You Have the Symptoms of A Medical Emergency,
Seek Emergency Care*

Washington, DC - The American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) and the Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) today issued a joint statement about the cases of swine flu in the United States and offered recommendations to the public about when to seek emergency care.

Saying the nation's emergency departments are on the front lines of any public health emergency, the two organizations urged the public to apply the "prudent layperson standard" to any illness or injury: If the average prudent person would think you have the symptoms of a medical emergency, then you need to seek emergency care.

"Emergency physicians and nurses are specially trained to assess your symptoms and treat you, and if you have any doubts about your medical condition, we are there for you," said Dr. Nick Jouriles, president of ACEP. "While news reports about the swine flu may have raised alarm, remember there are still very few actual cases of the illness in the United States. And if you have no symptoms, then you do not need to seek emergency care. If you do not have a fever or cough, it is extremely unlikely that you have the swine flu."

Emergency physicians and nurses in different parts of the country are seeing people who do not have symptoms, but are simply seeking information and reassurance that they are not ill, which both organizations say is understandable, given the widespread news coverage. To help people understand this disease and get the information they need, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is maintaining up-to-date web pages about the symptoms of swine flu and when to seek immediate medical care (www.cdc.gov/swineflu).

"If you have symptoms that would not ordinarily take you to the emergency department but are considering going because you are afraid you have swine flu, you probably do not need to go," said Bill Briggs, RN, president of ENA. "Remember that many illnesses – not just swine flu – are transmitted in public places and very often the best way to avoid the spread of disease is to stay home until your symptoms subside."

In the current push for health care reform, policymakers must recognize the unique role that emergency physicians and emergency nurses play, especially in times of crisis. Emergency departments are the nation's safety net, a point driven home this week with the threat of pandemic swine flu filling ERs with patients fearing they are infected. The safety net is under extraordinary stress in the best of times, never mind the worst.

“Even those ‘worried well’ who have primary care physicians are being directed to the emergency department because of our specialized expertise,” said Dr. Jouriles. “We stand on the front lines of any disaster and when all other doors are closed, our doors are always open. That is why true health care reform must strengthen America’s health care safety net – emergency departments.’

ACEP is a national medical specialty society representing emergency medicine with more than 27,000 members. ACEP is committed to advancing emergency care through continuing education, research and public education. Headquartered in Dallas, Texas, ACEP has 53 chapters representing each state, as well as Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. A Government Services Chapter represents emergency physicians employed by military branches and other government agencies.

ENA is the only professional nursing association dedicated to defining the future of emergency nursing and emergency care through advocacy, expertise, innovation and leadership. Founded in 1970, ENA serves as the voice of 37,000 members and their patients through research, publications, professional development, injury prevention and patient education. Additional information is available at ENA’s website www.ena.org.

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