

Second person dies from swine flu in Lee County

Health officials predict 160 deaths from H1N1

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A second Lee County resident has died from the H1N1 virus, or swine flu, according to state and county health officials.

It is unknown if the 53-year-old man had any pre-existing medical conditions.

As the second Lee County fatality in just over two weeks, the other being a 51-year-old man who died July 22, the death bucks initial ideas that the very young and old are most susceptible to the disease.

At this time there are no plans to release personal information about the latest fatality.

The death highlights some disturbing numbers for Lee County as local health officials are expecting 160 county residents, and more than 5,000 Floridians, to die from swine flu over the next two years.

"We know there is a high prevalence in the community, but to what degree we don't know," said Lee County Health Department spokeswoman Jennifer James-Mesloh. "If you look at the hospitalizations, emergency room admissions, information from medical providers ... then yes, we're seeing a significant increase."

Forty-one people have died statewide in Florida from swine flu.

There have been so many people who have tested positive for the flu strain, the state health department is no longer keeping track of the numbers.

State health department spokeswoman Michelle Dahnke said Florida, like most of the United States, is following the lead of the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization, both of which are no longer testing.

"We're no longer collecting the numbers of confirmed cases, and not every case is being tested," she said.

Dahnke added that of the 41 swine flu deaths in Florida, 12 were people who were in their 50s. The youngest death involved a 3-year-old and the oldest person was 90.

While Lee County Health Department officials are stressing good hygiene and, most importantly, not to panic, they are looking toward the start of the school year with some concern.

With a vaccine not due until October and no distribution plan set for Lee County, health officials, along with the public, can do nothing more than wait and see how the virus will affect county school children.

"I don't think there's any doubt that we're going to see an increase in H1N1 cases when kids go back to school," James-Mesloh said. "It's just logical sense. It's easy to pass those germs."

State and county health officials are stressing a proactive approach to swine flu: washing hands, using disinfectant and staying home from work and school if one exhibits symptoms.

For more information, visit the Lee County Health Department Web site at: www3.leegov.com/healthdept/ or call 332-9501.