The flu limits visitations

“Stop” signs are popping up in the halls of St. Luke Community Hospital in Ronan. The stop signs are a part of the “Stop the Flu” campaign being waged by the Ronan hospital to minimize the prevalence and severity of an influenza outbreak this fall.

“We are taking a proactive stance to limit exposure to our patients and staff by amending our visitation policy,” according to Shane Robert, CEO at St. Luke.

Following recommendations of the Center for Disease Control (CDC), effective immediately, those under the age of 18 will not be permitted to visit St. Luke hospital unless they are seeking medical care.
Roberts points out that this is a temporary change in the Ronan hospital’s visitation policy. He adds, “Early evidence shows that the young population has a higher incidence of infection with H1N1 flu and is contagious 24-hours prior to the on-set of symptoms.”

Donna McDaniel, Infection Control Nurse at St. Luke, adds, “We are also asking adult visitors with flu-like symptoms to stay home.” The flu indicators are fever, sore throat, cough, body aches and fatigue. McDaniel further states that it is recommended a person stay home for at least 24-hours after they are fever free adding, “We understand that these limitations may be an inconvenience but will change over time as the situation warrants.”

The St. Luke nurse says, “We’ve had a few cases of flu that have tested positive for H1N1 and are now treating every case that comes into the hospital as such.”

As a precaution to minimize the extent of a potential H1N1 outbreak this fall and winter, the Ronan healthcare organization has ordered extra supplies of masks, gloves, tissues, disinfectants and antiseptic wipes and hand-gels. Additionally nursing services is promoting hand hygiene and cough etiquette with staff, patients and visitors.

McDaniel points out that anyone with flu symptoms “will be asked to put on a mask and use proper hand hygiene if they come to our Emergency Department or Convenient Care.”

This week McDaniel received 40 doses of the H1N1 vaccine that have been allotted to St. Luke by the Lake County Health Department. “We are now going through a screening process to get the vaccine to the high risk population – specifically pregnant women and children older than 6-months,” the nurse explains.
She notes that the St. Luke clinics cannot purchase the vaccine and can only administer the vaccines that are allocated by the government through the Lake County Health Department.

She also emphasizes that the elderly are at low risk for H1N1. “Right now, children from age 6-months, young adults, pregnant women, health care workers and people with chronic health problems such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease are the ones being strongly encouraged to get the H1N1 vaccine,” McDaniel says. She adds that an estimated 65 million doses of the H1N1 vaccine will be available by the middle of November.

Roberts says, “Our primary goal is to uphold our responsibility to the community and our patients and to have all the resources needed to keep our staff healthy, to keep their families healthy and to treat patients with confidence.”

In addition to some critical staff members getting the H1N1 vaccination last week, all St. Luke employees have been encouraged to get vaccinated for seasonal flu. Over 65% of the employees have taken advantage of that preventive measure.

Although the “Stop the Flu” signs in the hospital are a visible reminder of the new visitation restrictions, McDaniel says that it is important to remember three simple rules to stop the spread of the flu virus: “Wash your hands thoroughly and on every occasion possible, keep your family members at home if they have flu-like symptoms, and be prepared to stay at home yourself if you develop flu-like symptoms.”

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