



Flu fears limit young hospital visitors

By Danny Bernardini/

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A few days after two Vacaville schools closed their doors over fears of an H1N1 outbreak, a Vacaville health care provider is changing its policy regarding who may visit hospitals.

Starting today, NorthBay Healthcare will not allow visitors under 16 in any of its Fairfield or Vacaville facilities.

NorthBay made the announcement Monday and posted a message on YouTube.com, with Dr. Donald Denmark, vice president of medical affairs, explaining the decision. That message can be found at www.youtube.com/user/NorthBayHealthcare.

The hospital's Web site, www.northbay.org, also features an entire section devoted to flu prevention.

"This will be inconvenient for some families, and perhaps frustrating," Denmark said in a press release. "But we have to put the safety of the patients first, and the safety of those who will be visiting a facility that has a growing number of patients with the flu."

Denmark said there may be visiting accommodations made for those under the age of 16 with extenuating circumstances.

Spokesmen for Vallejo's two main hospitals, Kaiser Permanente, Vallejo, and Sutter Solano Medical Center, said Monday that administrators are evaluating their respective institutions' visitation policies, but neither has imposed an age limitation.

"We have revised our visitation policies so we can be prepared, so we can restrict visitation if that becomes necessary," Sutter Solano spokesman Russell Neilson said.

Sutter has three levels of visitation, based on Centers for Disease Control and California public health recommendations, Neilson said.

"Level one is routine visitation, which is where we are now, though we do ask ill people not visit, and we have signs at all the doors to that effect," Nelson said. "And if we see someone who looks sick, we ask them not to visit if possible and offer masks."

Level two visitation limits patients to one or two family members and level three prohibits visitors entirely, Neilson said.

The hospital's visitation policy is being monitored, he said. "If we see a spike in the number of people who appear to be presenting with H1N1 symptoms, we'll adjust our visitor policy," he said.

Kaiser Vallejo isn't prohibiting visitors under 16 either, yet, spokesman Jim Caroompas said.

"We're reevaluating our policy as we speak," Caroompas said. "But we always ask anyone not feeling well not to visit."

For Sutter Solano Medical Center, a three-leveled system has been put in place to identify the risk of those visiting the facilities. According to Sy Neilson, Sutter spokesman, Level 1 is routine visitation; Level 2 is restricted visitation; and Level 3 is no visitation.

Sutter is at Level 1 and is asking visitors who are ill not to visit patients. If staff sees someone with flu-like symptoms, they approach them and give them the appropriate advice, Neilson said.

He added that the situation is constantly monitored.

For those wanting more information about H1N1, a public meeting is being held from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Thursday in room 1, 275 Beck Ave., Fairfield. Dr. Michael Stacey, deputy health officer with the county's Public Health Department, will be on hand to discuss the virus, give an update and talk about the public response.

Flu fears have risen after the death of a Vacaville 6-year-old on Oct. 18. The Browns Valley first-grader died in the VacaValley Hospital emergency room after suffering flu-like symptoms for a few days. As of press time, no official cause of death has been announced by the Solano County Coroner's Office, but officials have confirmed that she had the H1N1 strain.

Browns Valley Elementary plans to reopen and resume a normal schedule today after dismissing classes Friday and Monday, said Robin Cox of Solano County Public Health.

Vacaville Christian High School resumed classes on Monday after locking the doors on Thursday after a third of the staff and more than 40 students reportedly suffered from swine flu.

Times-Herald staff writer Rachel Raskin-Zrihen contributed to this report.

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