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**Texas Department of State Health Services
NEWS RELEASE
September 29, 2009**

Dial 2-1-1 for Flu Advice

Texans can now dial 2-1-1 to receive over-the-phone medical guidance about what they should do if they or a family member have flu symptoms.

The state's 2-1-1 health information helpline is now staffed with medical professionals who can provide information about managing flu symptoms and advice on when to seek medical care from a physician or emergency room.

"We want to help people make informed decisions about how to care for themselves and their families," said Dr. David Lakey, commissioner of the Texas Department of State Health Services. "Most H1N1 and seasonal flu cases can be successfully treated at home, without having to go to the doctor or without an unnecessary trip to the emergency room."

The guidance is not intended to replace specific instructions people receive from their physicians, Lakey said.

The 2-1-1 staff also can provide general flu information and vaccine availability information for individuals and health care providers. Calls are answered round-the-clock. Callers are instructed to choose a language and then press "6" for flu information and guidance.

Basic flu symptoms include fever, cough and sore throat that usually come on suddenly. Most cases are relatively mild to moderate and do not need emergency treatment. Most people who have H1N1 flu or seasonal flu just need appropriate fluid intake, fever-reducing medication, rest and careful monitoring, Lakey said. Recovering at home also lessens the burden on the health care system.

People with underlying health conditions who think they have the flu should contact their health care provider.

The flu information and guidance service is provided through a DSHS contract with the 2-1-1 Texas Information and Referral Network operated by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission.

For more information about flu in Texas, visit DSHS' www.TexasFlu.org.

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