

Below is a press release from Bon Secours and HCA on what that will mean for you:

Richmond and Tri-cities area hospitals announced a coordinated plan to reduce the spread of seasonal and H1N1 flu by limiting visitors to healthy adults 18 years and older and no more than two adult visitors at a time per patient.

Officials said that effective Monday, Oct. 26, they are limiting visitations in patient care areas at their hospitals because the flu is widespread in the Richmond area. Children, in particular, are more likely to get H1N1 flu and they can be infectious for longer periods of time, putting them at greater risk of carrying the virus into health care settings.

Limited exceptions for special circumstances will be made, for example, involving patients at the end of life or expectant and new fathers under the age of 18. Exceptions will be allowed at the discretion of the health care provider.

The policy will remain in effect throughout the flu season, at least through March 2010. Hospital systems working in conjunction with the Virginia Department of Health will evaluate the policy based on the incidence of flu in the community.

"I applaud this coordinated effort by Richmond area hospitals to protect their patients, visitors and health care providers," said State Health Commissioner Karen Remley, M.D., MBA. "This approach to infection prevention will help maximize safety for everyone."

Hospital officials noted that the H1N1 flu, in many cases, has been mild in the general population, and that persons with a usual case of seasonal or H1N1 can treat flu symptoms at home with rest, acetaminophen or ibuprofen to reduce fever and by drinking fluids.

Unnecessary trips to the hospital emergency room can spread the flu to others in the waiting room. For those who don't have the flu, it is likely to expose them to someone who has it. Persons with flu symptoms are encouraged to keep away from others as much as possible in order to avoid making others sick.

Hospital officials also said that unnecessary trips to the emergency room tax the ability of local emergency departments to handle heart attacks, broken bones, head trauma and other true medical emergencies. There are circumstances in which a trip to the emergency room or doctor's office is necessary. Individuals should seek medical care right away if they experience difficulty breathing, chest pain or an altered mental state, such as confusion. When in doubt, they should call their health care providers for advice.

The best way to prevent the seasonal or H1N1 flu is to cover coughs and sneezes and to wash hands often, especially after coughing or sneezing into them. According to the Virginia Health Department, H1N1 flu vaccine will be available for the general public at pharmacies, health care provider offices and local health departments in mid-November. Information is available at www.H1N1Get1.com and by calling 1.877.ASK.VDH3.

Participating hospitals include:

- Chippenham Hospital
- Henrico Doctors' Hospital
- Johnston-Willis Hospital

- John Randolph Medical Center
- MCV Hospitals