

# Local experts have flu advice

## Don't panic. Do wash your hands.

By Camden Easterling  
*Enterprise Staff Writer*

Health officials in Park County have two basic recommendations for the local swine flu outlook.

Don't panic. Do wash your hands.

"You really at this point don't need to worry too much," said Marsha Vanderhoff, Livingston HealthCare's Patient Services director and a registered nurse, on Thursday.



Swine flu, which has been reported in several countries around the world, has symptoms similar to the flu commonly seen in the United States, Vanderhoff said.

Montana does not have any reported cases of swine flu, according to an update posted Thursday on the state of Montana's Web site.

Park High School Principal Gary Kane this week, though, faced the decision of cancelling an upcoming trip to Dallas, Texas, for five students attending a conference for the Business Professionals of America. Texas has confirmed cases of swine flu.

"But it was an easy decision," he said Friday, "made for me by the national BPA."

The national organization on Thursday cancelled the conference, though the event might be rescheduled for June in Dallas, Kane said.

Both the common flu and swine flu are respiratory illnesses that spread through droplets when people cough, sneeze or touch a surface that has viruses on it and then touch their nose or mouth, according to the Centers for Disease control.

About 36,000 people in the U.S. die from complications of the common flu every year, according to the CDC.

Nevertheless, each year the country weathers flu season, local health authorities said this week.

Swine flu is rarely seen in humans and has more unknowns than the regular flu, but its similarities to the common flu means it can be managed like a common flu outbreak, Vanderhoff said. For example, physicians essentially use the same kind of flu test and antiviral medications, she said.

"I'm hoping it's going to run its course and not be as bad as a regular flu season," Suzanne Brown, a registered nurse and Park County's director of nursing services, said of swine flu.

If people have flu symptoms, they should consult with their doctor, local health officials said.

Livingston Memorial Hospital has taken some precautionary steps in recent days to prevent a potential spread of swine flu, should it arrive here, Vanderhoff said.

Hospital staff posted signs at entrances asking anyone with flu symptoms to don a mask and use hand sanitizer upon entering the building and to notify a staff member immediately of their concerns.

The hospital also is asking that anyone with flu symptoms not visit friends or family who are in the hospital.

Those kind of common sense approaches are the best when it comes to flu because they help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, local health authorities said.

"It just kind of makes sense to avoid contact with sick people, wash, use hand sanitizer," Vanderhoff said. "And if you're sick, stay home."

Brown also recommends that people prepare a three-day emergency supply kit with food, water, medications, etc., to have on hand in case the swine flu does hit hard in Park County.

However, she said, she gives that recommendation at all times. Having such a kit is always advisable because natural disasters or other emergencies can happen at any time, Brown said.

For more information on swine flu, go to the Health Department section of the county's Web site at [www.parkcounty.org](http://www.parkcounty.org).