

## Swine flu confirmed in Charlotte

By NEIL HUGHES STAFF WRITER

As Charlotte County's first confirmed case of swine flu quickly became a total of three unrelated infections Monday, one thing was clear: When it rains, it apparently pours.

Three separate cases of the H1N1 flu variant were discovered in individuals to start the week, marking Charlotte County's first confirmed infections months after the outbreak began to spread across North America.

That Charlotte County had its first case of swine flu should come as no surprise. It's the fact that all three cases are, as best investigators can tell, unrelated that makes it unexpected.

"It does seem odd," county health department spokesman Adam DuBois said. "We were just sitting in a meeting and I was saying, how does this all happen? Three separate cases all on the same day."

Those infected are a 7-year-old girl, a 6-year-old boy, and a 51-year-old woman who lives out of the state and was diagnosed in Charlotte County.

"The investigation is still under way," he said. "It's actually just started. So we're working to identify the source of the infection."

Dr. Mark Asperilla, a local infectious disease specialist, first treated the 7-year-old girl over the weekend and believes there could be two more cases: He said the girl's 14-year-old brother is currently hospitalized awaiting test results, and her cousin has also shown symptoms.

Asperilla said the 7-year-old girl recently had major surgery which made her especially susceptible to the H1N1 virus. But as soon as he began treating her, she was given the prescription TAMIFLU, and her condition has dramatically improved.

"We suspect her immune system is weak, and that's why she got it," Asperilla said.

While the 14-year-old brother has a fever, Asperilla said he does not expect the boy's situation to become dire.

"I think he's going to do better than the sister," he said. "We just put him down there (in the hospital) for precaution."

Asperilla has been giving lectures on swine flu lately to help spread awareness. He said flu epidemics typically come in cycles, and he expects a second wave of swine flu might hit this fall.

To protect yourself from the swine flu — or prevent the spread of it — stick with basic precautions like hand washing and covering your mouth when you cough. Asperilla said a cough can send out the virus in a 6-foot circumference, and it can live on surfaces like shopping carts and bathroom door handles for up to two hours.

"If you have the flu and you suspect swine flu, just stay at home," he said. "Don't expose other people."

As for why all three patients were discovered on the same day, DuBois speculated the cases could not be confirmed over the weekend, and so it all became known once the work week started.

"It could be just an odd thing," DuBois said. "But again, the investigation just started midmorning, so we haven't really even had a chance yet to go out and interview the families."

E-mail: [nhughes@sun-herald.com](mailto:nhughes@sun-herald.com)