

# In case of emergency

## DAMERON HOSPITAL MAKES SURE IT'S READY FOR WORST-CASE FLU SCENARIO

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STOCKTON - People of all ages are showing up at San Joaquin County's seven hospital emergency rooms with influenza symptoms, an unusual phenomenon related entirely to the new H1N1 virus that has landed 146 residents in the hospital and claimed six lives so far.

Stockton's Dameron Hospital, 525 W. Acacia Ave., is no exception.

Of its average 110 emergency room patients a day - a 20 percent increase over last year - about 30 people have flu-like symptoms, according to nurse manager Cheri Shirey.

Considering the time of year and the type of patient - far younger and healthier than the typical seasonal flu patient - this is unlike any year Shirey can remember in the ER.

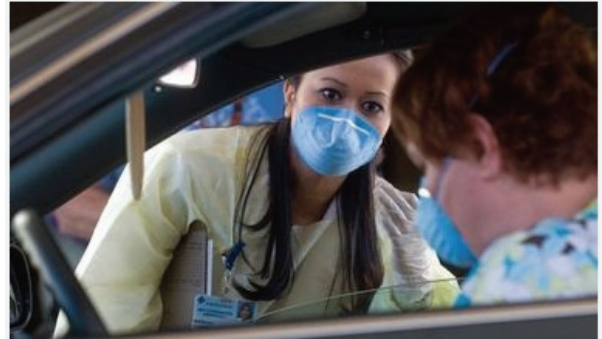
Shirey said an additional 10 to 20 patients a day with flu-like symptoms could inundate Dameron's emergency room.

The primary concern: keeping them isolated.

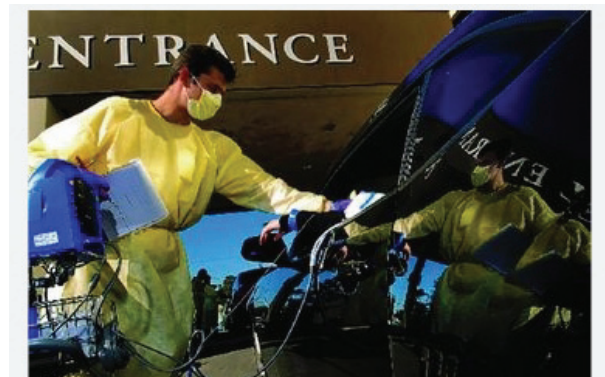
For that reason, she put together a four-hour drill Monday to quickly and efficiently identify patients arriving at the hospital with flu-like symptoms, keep them isolated from the rest of the hospital community and treat them appropriately. The drill was modeled after one she witnessed at Stanford Hospital in September.

The main feature of the drill was to establish a vehicle drive-through triage along the front drop-off lane just east of the hospital.

"When they stay in their car, it's like having them in their own little isolation room," Shirey said.



CLIFFORD OTO/The Record  
Registered nurse Maricel Taasin talks with mock patients in their cars Monday during Dameron Hospital's Functional Emergency Management Exercise. About 30 patients participated in the drive-up H1N1 screening and treatment drill.



CLIFFORD OTO/The Record  
Medical assistant Daniel Navrotskiy takes the vitals of mock patients in their cars Monday during Dameron Hospital's Functional Emergency Management Exercise.

When the day comes that the hospital is overwhelmed with flu patients, at least its staff will have had some training in emergency triage and treatment measures.

Patients walking up to the ER will be met at the door and asked if they have flu-like symptoms. If so, they will be directed to get back into their vehicle and drive into the drive-through lane on Lincoln Street. There, they will be met by a screener, also a trained triage nurse, who will ask them specific questions and provide them with a medical-grade mask.

If the screener determines the patient is critically ill, the patient will be directed immediately back to the emergency room or the screener can call a standby ambulance crew, part of the team of 20 health-care professionals working with the flu patients. Forty volunteers were drafted for Monday's drill, including members of University of the Pacific's basketball team and new nurses in Dameron's Versant nurse-residency training program.

The volunteers kept the triage line busy, presenting a variety of scenarios for the hospital staff to deal with, including days-old babies with high fevers or signs of dehydration, and even a 40-year-old man with chest pains whom the screener quickly identified as in severe distress. Paramedics in the mock scenario were called to remove the man from his car to rush him into the ER.

"When somebody presents like that, we want to roll them into ER right away. My job is, are they going to stay in the hospital or are we going to treat them out here?" said registered nurse Craig Shankland, who was serving as the drill's initial screener.

Within the ER, Dameron has already taken steps to streamline triage and treatment of flu patients. The key is to "separating the flu patients from the regular patients," according to medical director Dr. Brad Reinke. In addition to dealing with H1N1, Reinke said there are numerous reasons emergency departments are seeing a rise in flu patients, including increasing population, more people without a primary-care physician and more uninsured.

Shirey considered the drill a success.

"This is much safer for patients. They are not being coughed on by other people and not being exposed to germs," she said. "Our goal is to be able to treat them with the best possible care, and we want to make it safe for everyone."

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