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NEWS RELEASE

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Increased 'Flu Like Illness' Prompts Change in Hospital Visit Policies

Faxton-St. Luke's, St. Elizabeth and Rome Memorial Restrict Children and Symptomatic Adults

Citing an increase in reported flu, the County's three hospitals have instituted temporary age restrictions on visitors to their facilities in order to prevent the spread of influenza.

Effective immediately, Faxton-St. Luke's Healthcare, St. Elizabeth Medical Center and Rome Memorial Hospital are restricting visitors to healthy adults, 18 years and older. The policy will remain in effect until further notice according to a joint statement released today. Additionally, adults coming to the facilities for testing or treatment are asked to make arrangements for their children rather than have them accompany them.

"Another change in policy restricts visitation to the Maternity Units at Faxton-St. Luke's and Rome Memorial as well as the Pediatric Units at all three hospitals because patients in these units are at greater risk of complications from novel H1N1 flu," Dr. Daniel W. Gilmore, Acting Director of Health said *"Only parents, grandparents and birthing coaches will be allowed to visit new mothers and newborns and pediatric patients."* Gilmore stressed that parents, grandparents and birthing coaches should not visit if they are exhibiting flu-like symptoms.

According to Heather Bernard, R.N., Infection Prevention Manager at Faxton-St. Luke's, children don't always alert their caregivers when they are developing symptoms. *"Kids are also less likely to practice good respiratory hygiene by covering coughs and sneezes and thoroughly washing their hands. Since influenza is spread by droplets or by contact with an infected person up to 24 hours before they become symptomatic, limiting visitors to those 18 years and older will help protect our patients, visitors and staff from the flu."*

Signs alerting visitors to the hospitals of the visitor restrictions will be posted at all entry points. The signs will also serve to remind anyone with respiratory illness symptoms including cough, fever and sore throat should not visit.

Gilmore urges Oneida County residents to consult their primary health care provider if they experience flu-like symptoms before going to the hospital emergency room. If a person experiences mild to moderate symptoms including fever they should try to reduce the fever with the use of acetaminophen or ibuprofen and remain home. *"Persons experiencing a persistent high fever or respiratory problems should seek medical attention,"* Gilmore said.

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Parents with children complaining of symptoms should contact their primary health care provider and keep the child home from school.

The public is reminded that there is little need for testing for H1N1 Type A influenza. The virus is widespread and flu-like illness is generally presumed to be the H1N1 flu. But most cases are no more severe than seasonal influenza and do not warrant a trip to the emergency room.

For more information on H1N1 Type A influenza visit our web site at www.ocgov.net.

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