

Fourth swine flu sufferer dies

AAP June 26, 2009, 7:45 pm

A 71-year-old Melbourne woman has become the fourth Australian with swine flu to die.

Victoria's health department was notified of the woman's death late on Thursday night but her family has requested that no details of her medical history be released.

Acting health chief Rosemary Lester insists swine flu is generally mild but can have adverse effects on those with pre-existing medical conditions.

"It is important to remember that in the vast majority of cases, human swine flu is a mild illness which many people recover from without any medical treatment," she said in a statement.

"However, we know that for people with chronic medical conditions, influenza can be severe."

The death follows that of a 50-year-old long-term cancer sufferer who died at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Melbourne on Wednesday.

Authorities said at the time another person at the centre had also been diagnosed with swine flu.

A spokesman for the Department of Human Services said the latest victim was not the other swine flu sufferer at the Peter MacCallum Centre.

A 35-year-old obese and diabetic man from Colac in western Victoria and a 26-year-old man from a remote Aboriginal community in Western Australia died last week.

Dr Lester said high-risk people, including those who are pregnant or have respiratory diseases such as asthma, heart disease, diabetes, renal disease or are obese should see their doctor if they have flu symptoms.

There have been 1,509 cases of swine flu diagnosed in Victoria while there are many milder cases in the community that have not been tested, Dr Lester said.

A total of 3,519 people have been diagnosed with the potentially deadly virus across Australia, according to federal government figures released on Friday afternoon.

Meanwhile, a five-year-old girl and nine-year-old boy with swine flu have been admitted to NSW hospital intensive care units.

The children are among four swine flu sufferers who are currently in isolation in NSW hospitals.

The girl had no pre-existing medical risk factors for severe influenza, while the boy had a medical history of asthma.

"This is the very confronting side of H1N1 influenza 09 that can't and shouldn't be dismissed," NSW chief health officer Kerry Chant said in a statement.

NSW Health warned that previously minor outbreaks of the virus have led to an "increasing level of community transmission" and a spokeswoman confirmed that meant the virus was spreading with greater efficiency across affected parts of the country.

NSW Health urged people to take precautions such as washing hands regularly or staying away from work if they had flu symptoms.