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**SWINE FLU:
INFECTION CONTROL IN HOSPITALS WILL BE CRITICAL**

New York, New York—In response to confirmed cases of swine flu in Mexico, Canada, and the United States, European Union health officials are advising against travel to North America. At airports in Japan and several other Asian countries, thermal scanners are being used to identify fever among passengers from North America.

But in the U.S. the disease is already among us. The severity and extent are unknown. The SARS outbreak (severe acute respiratory syndrome) in 2003 teaches that rigorous infection control in hospitals may be key to limiting deaths from swine flu in the U.S. Much will depend on what hospitals do when the first seriously ill victims arrive.” If hospitals have effective infection controls in place, the disease can be prevented from spreading to visitors, healthcare workers and their families,” warns Betsy McCaughey, Ph.D., and Chairman of the Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths (RID), a national organization that educates the public and medical community about preventing infection. McCaughey explains that “77% of the people who contracted SARS in the Canadian outbreak were patients, visitors, or workers in hospitals. SARS was almost entirely a hospital infection epidemic.”

SARS -- four letters that filled the headlines in the spring of 2003, and then disappeared. "A report issued after the fact by the government of Ontario (The SARS Commission, Spring of Fear, December 2006) shows how hospitals in one city thwarted an epidemic while hospitals in another city made deadly mistakes" says McCaughey, an expert on preventing infection.

Many hospitals in the U. S. are under-prepared for a similar challenge. As many as ten percent of patients contract infections in the hospital, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Bacteria such as MRSA (methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus) and Clostridium difficile race through hospitals, spread by unwashed hands and unclean equipment. How can hospitals that are failing to prevent ordinary infections spread by touch contain a new, unknown virus that can spread whenever someone coughs or sneezes?

"The best defense against swine flu and other unknown pathogens is rigorous hospital hygiene and routine infection prevention. That is the lesson of SARS," says McCaughey.

Dr. McCaughey is available to speak about the precautions that should be taken in hospitals, schools, day care centers, nursing homes and other places where the disease can spread easily.

Betsy McCaughey, Ph.D., is founder of the Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths and former Lt. Governor of New York State.

<http://www.hospitalinfection.org>

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