

August 26, 2009

H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) Information From the California Department of Education

As you may know, the new H1N1 flu has been circulating throughout the state of California, and it is likely that, now that children are back to school, we will see an increase in flu cases spreading from child to child. There is new federal guidance for schools that provides a range of response options for school administrators and local health officials. This guidance, along with other information about flu preparedness and prevention, is available on the California Department of Education Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/fluinfo.asp>.

We are all hoping that the fall flu season will be mild, but it is important to be prepared for all possible scenarios, including a widespread pandemic. If flu begins spreading to large numbers of people, state and local health officers will need to balance the risk of flu cases in the community against the disruption that school dismissals can cause in both the educational field and in the community.

At this time, state and local public health officials have advised that students can - and should - continue to come to school, as long as they are not sick and do not have flu symptoms. Flu-like symptoms include: fever (over 100 degrees F), feverishness, cough, sore throat, runny nose, or stuffy nose. Additional symptoms may be experienced with H1N1 (swine) flu, including body aches, feeling very tired, and sometimes vomiting or diarrhea. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now recommend that **all individuals with an influenza-like illness or symptoms should remain home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications (like acetaminophen or ibuprofen), and should avoid contact with others.**

It is also important to teach your children how to reduce their risk of getting the flu and how to protect others from becoming infected. If we all practice good hygiene, health officials believe we can limit the spread of swine flu in our schools and child care centers.

- **Avoid close contact** with people who are sick.
- **Stay home when sick** and maintain distance from other people to prevent the spread of illness.
- **Wash hands often**, with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds (that is about as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice). Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective in reducing the spread of the flu.

- **Cover coughs and sneezes** with tissues or by coughing into the inside of the elbow. Wash hands after blowing nose or coughing into a tissue and dispose of tissues after use.
- **Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth** to prevent the spread of germs.

Public health officials stress that it is very important to get separate vaccinations for seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu this year. The seasonal flu vaccines were already in production when the new H1N1 flu broke out, and it may be available as early as August or September. It is recommended that you and your family get this vaccination as soon as it is available from your health care provider or local clinic. The H1N1 vaccine is currently being tested, and may be available sometime between October and January. The H1N1 vaccine may require two shots given several weeks apart to provide adequate protection. Initially there may be limited supplies, and high-risk groups may be vaccinated first.

Thank you for your cooperation in keeping our children and our schools healthy. If you have questions about the information or recommendations in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact Christine Amstutz, RN, MN, the Hart District Director of Health Services, at 259-0033, Ext. 368, or by e-mail at CVA@hartdistrict.org.