



August 24, 2009

Dear School Administrators:

Another school year is starting for North Dakota schools and students. The North Dakota Department of Health and the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction want to make sure that the new school year is as safe as possible when it comes to dealing with the new H1N1 influenza virus.

The emphasis of the national recommendations this fall is to minimize disease spread and minimize social disruption. We are encouraging schools to take appropriate measures to reduce the likelihood of needing to close schools because of the new H1N1 virus. The same basic measures that we have used for seasonal influenza apply to this new virus.

- Emphasize to staff and parents the importance of being vaccinated.
 - Get vaccinated against seasonal influenza.
 - Get vaccinated against the new H1N1 influenza when the vaccine becomes available.
- Staff and students need to stay home if they are ill with an influenza-like illness (Fever 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher with a cough or sore throat).
 - Stay home until 24 hours after fever has subsided without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- Practice good respiratory etiquette.
 - Cough, sneeze and blow noses into disposable tissues.
 - Throw tissues away immediately.
 - If no tissue is available, cough or sneeze into your sleeve (inside elbow).
- Practice good hand hygiene, washing hands often.
 - After sneezing, coughing or blowing nose.
 - Before eating.
 - After using the restroom.
 - Use of hand sanitizer is acceptable unless the hands are visibly soiled.
- Regularly clean environmental surfaces.
 - Use an EPA-registered product.
 - Clean on a regular basis – especially frequently touched surfaces.
 - Immediately clean surfaces that are visibly soiled.
- Adopt policies that are not punitive for students or staff who miss school because of an influenza-like illness, which, in turn, will help encourage those who are ill to stay home.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has developed a communications guide for schools that can be used to communicate these important messages to parents and staff. To access this tool, visit www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/toolkit. Attached are two documents that can be used by schools for communicating with and providing information to parents.

The new H1N1 influenza virus was discovered last April in Texas and California after Mexico had been experiencing an outbreak of respiratory disease. The virus causes illness similar to season influenza with the majority of people experiencing fever, cough, sore throat, body and muscle aches, headaches, congestion and other symptoms. A minority of patients have had diarrhea and vomiting. This virus

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appears to be causing more illness in younger people. In North Dakota, 57 percent of reported cases have occurred in people younger than 20.

Each year, the North Dakota Department of Health engages in several activities to assess the influenza situation in the state. One of these is the collection of school absenteeism data. We are looking for some additional schools to volunteer to help with this surveillance activity. Our goal is to try to get one school from each county to report absenteeism on a weekly basis throughout the influenza season (September 1, 2009, through June 1, 2010).

Finally, we are asking schools to please consult with local and state health and education officials before making a decision to close schools. If a decision to close schools because of illness is made, we are requesting you report the closure to us by using the following website:
www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/dismissal_form/dismissal_form.htm .

More information also can be found at the North Dakota Department of Health's influenza website at www.ndflu.com. If you desire more information or are interested in reporting absenteeism data, please contact Michelle Feist at 701.328.3177 or toll-free 800.472.2180.

Sincerely,



Kirby Kruger
State Epidemiologist

cc: Michelle Feist, NDDoH