

September 8, 2009

Action Steps for NM Schools to Prevent the Spread of Flu

Take the following steps to help keep students, teachers, and staff from getting sick with flu.

It is recommended that these steps be followed ALL the time and not only during a flu pandemic:

- **Educate and encourage students, teachers and staff to cover their mouth and nose** with a tissue when they cough or sneeze. Also provide them with easy access to tissues, running water and soap, and alcohol-based hand cleaners. Remind them to cover coughs or sneezes using their elbow instead of their hand when a tissue is not available.
- **Remind teachers, staff, and students to practice good hand hygiene** and provide time for them to wash their hands as often as necessary.
- **Send sick students, teachers, and staff home** and advise them and their families that sick people should stay at home until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever or signs of a fever (without the use of fever-reducing medicine).
- **Clean surfaces and items** that are likely to have frequent hand contact, such as desks, door knobs, keyboards, or pens, with cleaning agents that are normally used in these areas.
- **Move students, teachers, and staff who become sick at school to a separate room** until they can be sent home. Limit the number of staff who take care of the sick person, and provide a surgical mask for the sick person to wear if they can tolerate it and the mask is available.
- **Have face masks** available, if possible, and allow them to be worn by school nurses and other staff caring for people with influenza-like illness at school, if the ill person cannot tolerate the mask.
- **Encourage early medical evaluation for sick students and staff** at higher risk of complications from flu. People at high risk of flu complications who get sick will benefit from early treatment with antiviral medicines.
- **Stay in regular communication with local public health officials.**
- **Consider holding flu vaccination clinics at your school.** Both seasonal flu vaccine and H1N1 flu vaccine are recommended this year and will be available this fall. Contact your regional school health advocate (contact information below) or local public health office to find out more about school-based vaccination clinics.

Follow these steps to prepare for the flu during the 2009-2010 school year:

- Review and revise existing pandemic plans and focus on protecting high-risk students, teachers, and staff.
- Update student, teacher, and staff contact information as well as emergency contact lists.
- Identify and establish points of contact with the local public health and education agencies.
- Develop a plan to cover key staff positions, such as the school nurse, when staff stay home because they are sick.

- Develop communication tools (e.g., letters to parents, Web site postings) that can be used to send sick students home, dismiss students, and to remind parents and staff how long sick students and staff should remain at home. Check out *Preparing for the Flu: A Toolkit for NM Schools* for basic information and communication resources such as letters and flyers for parents. The toolkit is available at <http://nmhealth.org/H1N1/school.shtml>. More materials can be found at <http://www.flu.gov/professional/school/toolkit.html>.
- Review school policies and awards criteria to avoid any incentives for students or staff to go to school when sick (e.g., cancel perfect attendance awards).
- Consider revising school policies this flu season so that students who are absent due to a flu-like illness would need only a parent/guardian note and not a physician's note to return to school.
- Develop a school dismissal plan and options for how school work can be continued at home (e.g., homework packets, Web-based lessons, phone calls), if school is dismissed or students are sent home when sick. In general, school dismissals should only be considered if attendance reaches a level that makes operations of a school impractical. The decision to dismiss students should be made by the Health Department and the Public Education Department in collaboration with local school authorities. If the decision is made to dismiss all students, notify CDC and your state health and education agency by reporting a school or school district dismissal at www.cdc.gov/FluSchoolDismissal.
- Collaborate with the local health department, community organizations, local businesses, and social service agencies on a plan for flu response.
- Help families and communities understand the important roles they can play in reducing the spread of flu in schools.

For more information:

For more information, contact Dr. Mary M. Ramos, Office of School and Adolescent Health, NMDOH at: 505-222-8684 or marym.ramos@state.nm.us.

For local information, contact your regional School Health Advocate:

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