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Information for Parents Concerned about H1N1 in Schools

As a parent, you want to do everything possible to protect your children, especially when a new virus is circulating. The Department of Public Health (DPH) understands your concerns about your children being exposed to the H1N1 virus. But DPH, in accordance with National Centers for Disease Control does not recommend parents keeping their kids home from school- even if that school has a confirmed a case of H1N1 Flu.

There are two reasons for this:

- 1) Whether or not there is a confirmed case in your community or in your school, it is most likely there. You should assume that you and your child could be exposed to this new flu at school, at work or anywhere else in your community. Therefore, it is very important to take common sense precautions to protect yourself. Those precautions include washing your hands frequently with soap and warm water, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and staying away from people who are coughing or sneezing.

You can also help ensure that you don't spread an illness to others by covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze. Use a tissue, or cough into your sleeve if you don't have one.

Take this opportunity to reinforce both of these messages with your kids. Teach them how to keep themselves from getting sick, and how not to spread disease to others when they do get sick- whether it's a cold, the flu or some other illness.

- 2) Another reason DPH doesn't feel it's necessary to close schools, even with a confirmed case of H1N1, is that it doesn't seem to be any more severe than a regular seasonal flu. The Department doesn't close schools down for seasonal flu, so it wouldn't make sense to close them now.

Having said that, DPH has been, and will continue to, closely monitor the situation in coordination with schools. If the number of absences starts to grow, the Department will work with individual school districts to reassess the situation.

And one last important note: some children have significant underlying medical conditions that put them at increased risk for any flu – seasonal or H1N1. It makes sense for parents in this situation to talk to their child’s doctor about what is best for their child, just as they do when regular flu season starts. To reiterate, DPH believes it is safe for kids to go to school just like they would during flu season, but ultimately, it’s a parent’s decision. If you have questions, you should consult your child’s doctor so you can have the information you need to do what you feel is best for your child.