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MEMORANDUM

FROM: Rashmi Chugh, M.D., M.P.H., Medical Officer
Maureen McHugh, Executive Director

DATE: October 14, 2009

SUBJECT: 2009 H1N1 Influenza School Guidance and Illness Prevention

In close consultation with the DuPage Regional Office of Education, the DuPage County Health Department is continually monitoring and staying up to date with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) guidance. Our collaborative consideration of school dismissal or closure takes into account these guidelines alongside daily review of student and staff absenteeism data from each DuPage County school, and we very much appreciate your cooperation in this endeavor.

2009 H1N1 (swine) influenza virus activity has been confirmed nationally as well as locally since April 2009, and has been causing outbreaks in schools and universities since this school year began. Continued circulation of 2009 H1N1 influenza virus is expected this fall and winter. We have adopted prevention and control strategies to **reduce the health impact of H1N1 flu** within our communities, to **decrease exposure to regular seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu** while **limiting the disruption of day-to-day activities and the vital learning** that goes on in schools.

Based on CDC guidance (most recently updated August 31, 2009), the decision to dismiss students should be made locally and should **balance the goal of reducing the number of people who become seriously ill or die from influenza with the goal of minimizing social disruption and safety risks to children sometimes associated with school dismissal**. Based on the experience and knowledge gained in jurisdictions that had large outbreaks in spring 2009, the potential benefits of preemptively dismissing students from school are often outweighed by negative consequences, including students being left home alone, workers missing shifts when they must stay home with their children, and interruption of students' education. We will continue to work closely with school officials to protect the health of students, staff, families, and surrounding communities with ongoing evaluation and response based on each school's circumstances.

As the 2009 H1N1 influenza outbreak expanded and became widespread, CDC and IDPH have discontinued individual case counts, and now require only case reporting of **hospitalizations (\geq 24 hours) and deaths** due to confirmed or probable 2009 H1N1 influenza, and **pediatric deaths** with illness that is clinically compatible with influenza for which there is any positive influenza test (for seasonal and/or novel influenza). Therefore, outpatient 2009 H1N1 influenza cases are no longer routinely reported. Since disease activity has been well established, disease testing and reporting resources are now being focused toward monitoring disease severity, to provide a fuller picture of the burden of serious flu illness and deaths during this pandemic (integrated with routine seasonal surveillance). **Influenza-like illness (ILI) absenteeism monitoring in schools serves as 1) an indirect measure of disease activity as well as 2) an indicator that parents are adhering to recommendations about non-attendance for students with ILI.**

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Although most infected persons will recover after a mild to moderate course of illness, **the most concerning aspect of influenza infection is the serious illness that can occur and in many instances can be prevented with prompt and appropriate care.** Since influenza is primarily spread by direct contact with nose and throat secretions, there are measures we can all take to reduce our chances of becoming sick with influenza:

- **Know the signs and symptoms of the flu.** Symptoms of the flu include fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit or greater), cough, sore throat, a runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, and feeling very tired. *For medical questions or concerns, contact your physician.*
- **Early treatment of high-risk students and staff:** People at high risk for influenza complications who become ill with influenza-like illness should speak with their physician as soon as possible. Early treatment with antiviral medications is very important for people at high risk because it can prevent hospitalizations and deaths. People at high risk include those who are pregnant, have asthma or diabetes, have compromised immune systems, or have neuromuscular diseases.
- **Practice good hand hygiene by washing your hands often** with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- **Stay home if you are sick** until at least 24 hours after there is no longer a fever or signs of a fever (without the use of fever-reducing medications). This will help reduce the number of people who may get infected.
- **Cover your nose and mouth** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and throw it away after use.
- **Do not share eating utensils or drinking containers.** Persons should not share straws, cups, glasses, water bottles used during sports or recreation, cigarettes, etc.
- **Get your family vaccinated** for seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu as vaccines are available.

For more influenza information and updates, please visit www.protectdupage.org, www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/, or www.flu.gov.

For general information, call the **H1N1 Hotline at 630-221-7600.**

Thank you for your ongoing cooperation and support.

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