

## LETTER FROM THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT:

### Action Steps for Parents to Protect Your Child and Family from the Flu this School Year

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends 4 main ways you and your family may keep from getting sick with the flu at school and at home:

- **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.
- **Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow or shoulder; not into your hands.
- **Stay home if you or your child is sick** for at least 24 hours after there is no longer a fever or signs of a fever (without the use of fever-reducing medicine). Keeping sick students at home means that they keep their viruses to themselves rather than sharing them with others.
- **Get your family vaccinated** for seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu when vaccines are available.

### Action Steps for Parents of Children at High Risk for Flu Complications

Children with chronic health problems such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, metabolic conditions, neurologic and neuromuscular disorders, or who are pregnant are at higher risk of having complications from flu. In addition, all children younger than 5 years old are at higher risk of flu complications compared to older children. If you are not sure if any of your children are at higher risk for flu complications, please check with a doctor.

### Keep children at high risk for flu complications from getting sick with the flu

- Teach or help your children to wash their hands for 20 seconds with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub, and to do this often, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Have your child **cough and sneeze into a tissue** or into his or her elbow or shoulder if a tissue is not available.
- **Keep your child away from people who are sick.**
- **Clean surfaces and objects that your child frequently touches** with cleaning agents that are usually used.
- When there is flu in your community, consider your child's risk of exposure if they attend public gatherings. In communities with a lot of flu, **people who are at risk of complications from flu should consider staying away from public gatherings.**
- If flu is severe in your community, talk to your doctor and child's school to **develop a plan concerning how to handle your child's special needs.**
- **Get your child vaccinated** for seasonal flu and H1N1 flu when vaccines are available.
- Recognize if your children are sick. Some children may not be able to tell you about their symptoms, which can result in a delay in responding to their illness. It is important to watch carefully for the signs and symptoms of flu or unusual behavior that may be a sign your child is sick. Symptoms of flu include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, and fatigue. A fever is a temperature taken with a thermometer that is equal to or greater than 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees Celsius). If you are not able

to measure a temperature, your child might have a fever if he or she feels warm, has a flushed appearance, or is sweating or shivering.

- Watch for emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention. These warning signs include:

Fast breathing or trouble breathing

Bluish or gray skin color

Not drinking enough fluids

Not urinating or no tears when crying

Severe or persistent vomiting

Not waking up or not interacting

Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held

Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen

Sudden dizziness

Confusion

Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Please share this information with your child's teacher or other caregivers, so they can tell you if they notice your child is not feeling well.

#### **Tips for taking care of high risk children with the flu:**

- **Contact your doctor immediately if your child is sick.** This is important because the antiviral medicines used to treat flu work best when started within the first 2 days of getting sick. Your doctor will tell you what special care is needed for your child.
- **Keep your sick child at home** until at least 24 hours after there is no longer a fever or signs of a fever (without the use of a fever-reducing medicine). Keep your child home unless they need to go to the doctor.
- **Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks clear fluids** (such as water, broth, sports drinks, electrolyte beverages for infants, Pedialyte®) to keep from being dehydrated.
- **If your child has a fever, use fever-reducing medicines that your doctor** recommends based on your child's age. Aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) **should not** be given to children or teenagers who have flu; this can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome.
- **Keep your sick child in a separate room** (a sick room) in the house as much as possible to limit contact with household members who are not sick. Consider designating a single person as the main caregiver for the sick child.