



Illinois State Board of Education

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Jesse H. Ruiz
Chairman

Christopher A. Koch, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Education

August 18, 2009

Dear School Superintendents and Principals:

As we enter a new school year and approach the fall influenza season, we wanted to inform you of important developments and information needed to plan for influenza and recommend actions you can take in order to lessen the impact of the flu on students and staff, as well as the local community.

The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in collaboration with state and local health education agencies, are implementing a Web-based school dismissal monitoring system for the 2009-10 school year. This monitoring system will generate daily data on the number of school dismissals in Illinois and other states. School dismissals are defined as any instance of a public or private school with any of grades K-12 that dismissed all students for one or more days and any instance when an entire school building with any of grades K-12 was completely closed to all students and staff in response to confirmed or suspected H1N1 influenza cases.

We need you to assign an individual at the district level who would be responsible for promptly entering information about the occurrence of school dismissal into the Web-based monitoring system at www.cdc.gov/FluSchoolDismissal and by August 31 report that person's name to Jeff Aranowski by e-mail at jaranows@isbe.net or by fax to Jeff at 312-814-8190.

In addition, attached is information on revised school guidance for decreasing the spread of seasonal flu and the novel influenza, H1N1, formerly referred to as swine flu, which has been circulating in Illinois and the United States since last spring. The goal of these recommendations from the CDC is to limit the disruption of day-to-day activities in schools. Note that based on this new guidance and the current level of severity of H1N1 influenza, school closure is unlikely to be recommended unless absenteeism levels interfere with the school's ability to function or the school has large numbers of individuals at high risk of influenza complications.

Federal, state and local officials will be encouraging all individuals to receive a yearly seasonal flu shot now or as soon as the vaccine is available. This simple vaccination, which also can be delivered in a nasal spray, is the single most effective way to prevent seasonal flu. While everyone is urged to get a seasonal flu vaccination, children between the ages of 6 months and 18 years of age are particularly susceptible to the flu and should be vaccinated.

Complicating this year's flu season is the existence of H1N1 influenza. This novel influenza virus can spread more quickly than seasonal influenza, and young people are disproportionately impacted by severe illness from this virus.

The federal government is currently working to develop a vaccine for H1N1 influenza and clinical trials are now being conducted to assess immune response and safety. The vaccine is expected to be available in mid-October, and children will likely need two doses of the vaccine, either a shot or nasal spray, spaced three weeks apart.

Besides vaccinations, please also continue to encourage staff and students to exercise good personal hygiene habits. Remember the three *Cs*: ***Clean*** – Wash your hands frequently to prevent the spread of germs; ***Cover*** – Your cough or sneeze with a tissue or sleeve, not your hand; and ***Contain*** your germs – stay home if you are sick.

A draft letter also is attached that you can use as written or adapt for your purposes to distribute to parents encouraging them to have their children vaccinated this fall against seasonal influenza and H1N1 influenza when the vaccines are available.

Flu preparedness is a shared responsibility and we strongly recommend you collaborate with your local health department and other health care and emergency officials to be prepared. Please stay informed and keep up with the latest information on the flu by visiting www.ready.illinois.gov or www.flu.gov.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Christopher A. Koch in black ink.

Christopher A. Koch, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Education

Handwritten signature of Damon T. Arnold, M.D., MPH in black ink.

Damon T. Arnold, M.D., M.P.H.
Director, Illinois Department of Public Health