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Health Alert Influenza Resources for Schools

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2009 H1N1 (swine) influenza virus continues to circulate throughout the country, and is currently causing outbreaks in schools and universities. Continued circulation of 2009 H1N1 influenza virus is expected this fall and winter in every county in Illinois, and collaboration between schools and local health departments will continue to be an important component of our efforts to minimize the impact of influenza on health and education. In order to provide additional resources for schools and local health departments, the following documents are attached:

1. Guidance, in question and answer format, on tracking influenza-like-illness (ILI) and absenteeism in schools, as well as other issues that have arisen. This document will continue to be updated as necessary.
2. A form that can be used for ongoing monitoring of absenteeism and dismissals. This form is also available in electronic spreadsheet format.
3. A form for reporting to local health departments excessive rates of ILI visits to school nurses.

Please note that many local health departments and school districts may have already established mechanisms for sharing and responding to absenteeism and ILI data. This document provide resource information regarding absenteeism and ILI data for school districts and local health departments that do not have such arrangements in place, or may wish to modify existing processes.

4. Information that can be distributed to parents regarding recognition of manifestations of severe illness, and the importance of medical care for children at risk for complications of influenza. Although mild illness is the most common manifestation of influenza, and can be disruptive to schools, 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. This information, targeted at prevention and care of severe illness, can be distributed along with other, routine influenza prevention messages.
5. Additional guidance for schools, including template letters to parents (in the communications toolkit) is available on the flu.gov website, at <http://flu.gov/professional/school/index.html>.

Please continue to consult with your local health department as needed regarding issues that arise in your schools.

Information on influenza surveillance in Illinois is available at <http://www.idph.state.il.us/flu/fluupdate08-09.htm> ; additional information is available at <http://www.readyillinois.gov> .