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Promoting and protecting the health of the public and the environment

August 17, 2009

Dear Parents/Guardians:

The novel H1N1 flu (swine flu) has continued to affect our state during the summer break and has been declared a worldwide pandemic. We believe that this flu virus might spread more now that schools are back in session. We need your help to prevent the spread of flu among our children.

The novel H1N1 flu (swine flu) spreads the same way that regular seasonal flu viruses spread, mainly through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick with the flu. It can also spread when a person touches an object or surface that harbors flu germs, then touches their eyes, nose or mouth.

The best way to prevent the flu is by getting your flu shot each year. We expect that a vaccine to fight the novel H1N1 flu (swine flu) will be available later this year. Please watch for its availability and discuss vaccination with your school nurse or other health care provider.

You can also help slow the spread of flu by doing the following:

- Talk with your child about hand washing. Frequent hand washing with soap and warm water helps remove germs and viruses. Children should wash their hands for about 20 seconds or as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.
- Teach your child to cover his or her mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and then to throw the tissue away. Your child can cough or sneeze into his or her upper sleeve if no tissue is handy. Wash hands afterward.
- Encourage your child to eat healthy foods, exercise, and get plenty of rest.
- Keep your child home if he or she has a fever of 100°F or higher and a cough or sore throat for which there is no known cause. Call your child's school and tell them your child's symptoms. In most cases, your child can return to school after he or she has been fever free for at least 24 hours **without** taking fever-reducing medications.
- Make sure the school has a way to reach you during the school day. Students who become ill at school with flu-like symptoms must be sent home.

We greatly appreciate your help and understanding. Families should have plans for child care in the event that schools and day care centers must be closed. Information on the novel H1N1 flu (swine flu) continues to change quickly. We will do our best to keep you informed. Together we can keep our children and schools healthy.

If you have questions, please call your child's school or your local DHEC public health department.

Sincerely,

C. Earl Hunter, Commissioner