

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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H1N1 Flu and Back-to-School

State public health department and state board of education team up to keep students healthy during upcoming Fall flu season

SPRINGFIELD – Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. Damon T. Arnold and Illinois State Superintendent of Education Christopher A. Koch today are issuing flu guidance to schools to help reduce illness in schools statewide. The guidance is designed to decrease the spread of regular seasonal flu and the new H1N1 flu while limiting the disruption of day-to-day activities and the learning that goes on in schools.

“As the school year begins for children across Illinois, we want to reassure students, parents, teachers and staff that the Illinois Department of Public Health and Illinois State Board of Education are working together to protect the health of students and staff,” said Dr. Arnold. “We anticipate more illness from the H1N1 flu this fall compared to this past spring and more school-based outbreaks because influenza is typically transmitted more easily in fall and winter when children congregate indoors. By issuing guidance and planning now, schools can help ensure they’re prepared for any future flu activity.”

Similar to school guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) are issuing the following guidance.

- **Stay home when sick.** Students and staff with flu-like illness should stay home for at least 24-hours after they no longer have a fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines.
- **Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.** Students and staff should step up basic health hygiene practices like the 3 Cs – clean, cover and contain. Taking these precautions is vital to limiting the spread of illness.

Clean – wash your hands frequently to prevent the spread of germs.

Cover - your cough or sneeze with your elbow or sleeve.

Contain – students and staff should stay home if they’re sick.

- **Separate ill students and staff.** Watch for students and staff who appear to have flu-like illness and those who do should be sent to a separate room away from others until they can go home.
- **Routine cleaning.** School staff should routinely clean areas that students and staff touch often with the cleaners typically used by the school.
- **School dismissal.** Local school districts and local health officials should work closely to balance the risks of flu in their community with the disruption school closures will cause in both education and the wider community. The length of time schools should be dismissed will vary depending on the type of

dismissal as well as the severity and extent of illness. Schools that dismiss students should do so for five to seven calendar days and should reassess whether or not to resume classes after that period.

Should the severity of H1N1 flu increase this fall, there is additional guidance to actively screen students and staff for fever and other symptoms upon arrival at school; have those at high-risk for influenza complications stay home; and extend the amount of time those who are ill to stay home.

“Children can’t learn if they are sick. We want to do everything possible to create the best learning environments for all our children and ensure their good health and safety,” said Superintendent Koch. “We will continue to work closely with the Illinois Department of Public Health and we urge local school districts to be in close contact with their local health departments during this school year.”

The Illinois Department of Public Health and the State Board of Education are encouraging everyone, all students and staff, to get a seasonal influenza flu shot this year as soon as it is available in their communities. Getting a flu shot is the best way to protect against becoming ill with the flu.

The CDC is working on developing a vaccine for H1N1 flu. This vaccine is separate from the seasonal flu vaccine and initial shipments are expected to be available in mid-October. The seasonal flu vaccine is one shot for most people, but it’s anticipated the H1N1 vaccine will require two shots. The H1N1 vaccine is not intended to replace the seasonal flu vaccine – it is intended to be used in addition to seasonal flu vaccine.

For more information log onto www.ready.illinois.gov. Similar to the CDC reporting system, IDPH is no longer reporting confirmed and probable cases of H1N1 flu in Illinois on its Web site. Instead, IDPH has transitioned to using its traditional flu surveillance systems to track the both H1N1 flu and seasonal influenza. H1N1 flu data will continue to be collected, but the IDPH Web site will only report the number of confirmed hospitalizations and deaths related to H1N1 flu to determine the severity of flu activity in Illinois.