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Talking Points for School Administrators
Re: Information for Parent Concerned about H1N1 in Schools

- We are working very closely with the Department of Public Health (MDPH) to make sure we are following the most up to date guidance from the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). MDPH, in accordance with CDC, does not recommend parents keeping their children home from school- even if that school has a confirmed case of H1N1 Flu.

There are two reasons for this:

1. Whether or not there is a confirmed case in our community or our school, the virus is likely circulating in the community. You should assume that you and your child could be exposed to this new flu at school, at work or anywhere else in your community.

Therefore, it is very important to take common sense precautions to protect yourself. Those precautions include washing your hands frequently with soap and warm water, or using an alcohol based hand-sanitizer, and staying away from people who are coughing or sneezing.

You can also help ensure that you don't spread an illness to others by covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze. Use a tissue, or cough into your sleeve if you don't have a tissue.

Take this opportunity to reinforce both of these messages with your children. Teach them how to keep themselves from getting sick, and how not to spread disease to others when they do get sick- whether it's a cold, the flu or some other illness.

2. Because there is currently no vaccine to protect against this virus, it is especially important that prevention measures (such as hand washing and cough etiquette are followed.)
3. Another reason the CDC and DPH don't feel it's necessary to close schools, even with a confirmed case of H1N1, is that our observations suggest that H1N1 isn't any more severe than a regular seasonal flu. We don't close schools for seasonal flu, so it wouldn't make sense to close them now.

- We are in regular contact with DPH, who is closely monitoring the situation. We are taking measures to limit the spread of disease in our school and to continually assess the situation. If the number of absences starts to grow, we will work with individual school districts to reassess and address the situation.

In the mean time, we have implemented the following steps in our school: *(discuss any of the following that you are doing in your district)*

- Monitoring absenteeism in children and staff and following up to determine if absence is due to influenza-like illness. School nurses and student health centers are reporting higher than normal absenteeism to our local health department and the MDPH Epidemiology Program.
 - Screening children as they enter school, during home room or other appropriate time to identify any with fever and symptoms of influenza-like illness. Any ill child will be isolated and sent home.
 - If the ill child or staff member presents with upper respiratory symptoms, as well as fever, he/she should wear a mask, if available, until leaving the school to decrease the spread of the virus.
 - If there are an unexpected number of absences in a particular class room or grade, children in that class or grade will be screened to identify any that may have symptoms.
 - Putting hand sanitizer in each classroom to facilitate regular hand hygiene.
 - Asking the teacher and school nurse to do presentations and demonstrations on handwashing and cough etiquette in each class.
 - Arranging specific handwashing breaks before snack, lunch or at other specified times.
 - Sending handwashing or other flu control educational materials home to parents and asking for their assistance in reinforcing these messages with their children.
 - Distributing the Flu Check List to families and asking that parents use it if they are unsure if their child is well enough to go to school. Reinforce with parents that their children should stay home if they are ill.
- And one last important note: some children have significant underlying medical conditions that put them at increased risk for any flu – seasonal or swine. It makes sense for parents in this situation to talk to their child's doctor about what is best for their child, just as they do when regular flu season starts. We want to reinforce that we think it is safe for children to go to school just like they would during flu season. If parents have questions, they should consult their child's doctor so they can have the information they need.