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August 10, 2009

Dear Los Angeles County School Administrators:

On August 7, 2009, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued further guidance for schools regarding the pandemic H1N1 flu. The guidance can be found at the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/>. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health concurs with the CDC guidance and will soon be issuing our own updated guidance to schools, colleges and universities within the county on practical approaches to limit the spread of pandemic H1N1 flu on school campuses. Some of the key CDC recommendations include:

- **Stay home when sick:** Those 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. A lingering cough may sometime occur, but should not be the sole reason to refuse readmission.
- **Separate ill students and staff:** Students and staff who appear to have flu-like illness should be sent to a room separate from others until they can be sent home. CDC recommends that they wear a surgical mask, if possible, and that those who care for ill students and staff wear protective gear such as a mask.
- **Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette:** The new recommendations emphasize the importance of the basic foundations of influenza prevention: stay home when sick, wash hands frequently with soap and water when possible, and cover noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or a shirt sleeve or elbow if no tissue is available).

Because it is so important for those who are sick to stay home, we encourage all families to start planning alternative child care options so that they can keep their child home from school, daycare, or afterschool programs and camps during an illness. We also encourage employers to develop business continuity plans in case sick employees need to take time off for themselves or a family member. These proactive steps can minimize the spread of disease and safeguard the health of our community.

As you may know, the CDC and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have announced that a large scale pandemic H1N1 flu vaccination campaign is likely to be conducted this fall. While many details of the plan have yet to be determined, our department is developing a comprehensive plan that will be ready for implementation once the vaccine is available.

On July 29, 2009, the CDC announced the population groups that will be prioritized if the vaccine is initially available in extremely limited quantities. Several factors, including current disease patterns, how much vaccine is expected to be available, and the timing of vaccine availability, were considered when determining the priority groups. These five key populations include:

- Persons between the ages of 6 months through 24 years of age,
- Health care and emergency services personnel,
- Pregnant women,
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age, and
- People from ages 25 through 64 years who are at higher risk for pandemic H1N1 flu infection because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems.

Based on CDC estimates from vaccine manufacturers, the pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine may be ready for distribution in mid-October. Children and young adults ages 24 and younger will be a critical group for H1N1 vaccination because they have been, and will likely continue to be, disproportionately affected by pandemic H1N1 flu. To help coordinate this large scale vaccination effort we will be working with public and private partners including health plans, health care providers, retail pharmacies, community-based groups, hospitals, clinics, and schools.

As soon as we have information on how to obtain pandemic H1N1 flu vaccination in Los Angeles County, we will share it with you and hope you will help urge students to be vaccinated. More than one flu virus can circulate through communities at a time, which is why we are also urging everyone to get the seasonal flu vaccine, which comes out every year. Seasonal vaccine will be available starting this fall, and is recommended for everyone, starting at 6 months of age.

To help schools prepare for this upcoming flu season and to protect the health of school communities in general, we have created an online toolkit for schools with resources including posters, flyers and fact sheets to help prepare and respond to a public health emergency ([www.laschooltoolkit.com](http://www.laschooltoolkit.com)) as well as an online preparedness training program for schools and communities ([www.laschoolhealth.com](http://www.laschoolhealth.com)).

Please feel free to contact our Office of External Relations and Communications at (213) 240-8144 should you have any questions regarding this information. In addition, we encourage you to visit our website (<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>) to get the most up to date information on this situation and to access resources that can be used to promote healthy habits in schools.

We look forward to being in close contact in the upcoming months and thank you for your patience and your continued support as we all work towards ensuring the health of our students, faculty and communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jonathan E. Fielding". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH  
Director and Health Officer

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