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DR. VERONICA C. GARCÍA
SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

BILL RICHARDSON
Governor

September 3, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: District Superintendents, Charter School Administrators

FROM: Dr. Veronica C. García (signature on file)
Secretary of Education

RE: **Update on H1N1**

I am sure many of you are aware that there have been clusters of H1N1 influenza cases in schools in New Mexico.

The Department of Health, as the lead agency for information related to H1N1, would like school officials to know that if a student is sick with influenza, it is assumed to be H1N1 because that is the flu strain that is currently affecting students. It is the predominate strain circulating in New Mexico (and worldwide). Fortunately, the illness caused by this strain has been generally mild. It is important that school officials recognize and acknowledge that students in their school may have H1N1. However, it is equally important not to start a panic.

The Department of Health is closely monitoring hospitalized cases to see if there is a change in the severity of H1N1. They will not report or test every case throughout the state as was done last spring. DOH will issue news releases, as needed, to provide the public with the latest recommendations for preventing H1N1 and to update any significant changes with the spread of influenza in New Mexico. If a school district is mentioned in the news release, one of the Public Education Department Public Information Officers will call the Superintendent to discuss the release with her/him.

School officials should continually provide basic prevention information for staff, students and parents. Basic messages should include: frequent hand washing; when coughing or sneezing cover one's mouth with tissues or cough into the inside of one's elbow; cleaning high use school surfaces regularly; and staying home when sick. Symptoms of H1N1 include a fever, cough and/or sore throat. People should stay home until 24 hours after a fever breaks without using a fever-reducing medicine.

In order to assist schools, the Department of Health has developed a very comprehensive resource for schools "Preparing for the Flu: A toolkit for NM Schools". These resources can be downloaded at: <http://nmhealth.org/h1n1/school.shtml>.

I know that we all share the same concern regarding the swine flu for the well being of our students, families, and community. To that end, I assure you that I'm in frequent contact with the Health Secretary, Dr. Alfredo

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Vigil. As information becomes available we will provide it to you. When questions arise from the field, we immediately forward them to the Department of Health, and we will provide you the latest guidance.

School closures should be considered only if attendance reaches a level that makes operations of a school impractical. Note, that in the event of a school or district closure, districts are being required to continue provision of food services and educational services. Many of you may have already received MOU's and guidance on food services. You will be receiving guidance on continuation of educational services soon. Please call me should you reach a threshold where you are considering a school closure.

We are working on scheduling a conference call, as I did last spring, with Superintendents to discuss H1N1 issues. I am asking Secretary Vigil, Homeland Security and Emergency Management Secretary John Wheeler, and Dr. Mike Landen to be on the call so they can also respond to your questions. The conference call is tentatively scheduled for Monday, September 14, 2009 from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. As soon as the details of the call are finalized, I will send another email with calling instructions.

Again, the best defense is prevention. Please follow the guidelines in the School Toolkit on the DOH and PED website. Thank you for your continued support and diligence on this important issue affecting the health and well-being of students and staff.

VCG/BF

cc: PED Executive Team