



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104

Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5534

www.adph.org

Safeguard your children for the coming influenza season

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Jim McVay, DrPA
(334) 206-5600

As Alabama schools open for the 2009-2010 school year with novel H1N1 influenza circulating, a significant new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendation reduces the amount of time students and staff with influenza-like illness should stay home from school after they are symptom free. Based on current flu conditions, sick students and staff should stay home until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

Parents are reminded that an influenza immunization is the best way to protect their children's health during the flu season. While it is unknown how severe the season will be, students are especially prone to influenza and are likely to spread flu viruses.

Two different influenza vaccinations will be recommended for children this season—the traditional vaccination for seasonal influenza and one or more vaccinations for novel influenza A (H1N1). Ample quantities of seasonal influenza vaccine are expected to be on hand soon. The novel influenza A (H1N1) vaccine is expected to be available after the school year begins.

“Unfortunately, the H1N1 (Swine Flu) virus did not take the summer off,” said Dr. Joe Morton, State Superintendent of Education. “Its impact is still being felt around the world. As a result, we should continue to take preventative measures in both homes and schools to reduce the virus spreading in Alabama.”

Dr. Morton added, “We want children, parents and educators to continue to follow the common sense approach advised last school year: wash your hands often; avoid being near people who are ill; if you are sick, stay home from work or school; cover your cough with a tissue, and keep hands away from your face. These simple steps will lessen the potential impact of H1N1 in our state and help keep us all healthier.”

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said, “We encourage these preventive measures and also want to ensure the maximum numbers of children are protected against influenza by offering immunizations. We now recommend an early immunization for seasonal influenza and two doses of the novel H1N1 influenza vaccine when it becomes available. We also urge anyone experiencing flu symptoms to contact their physician or health care provider if they have severe symptoms.”

Target groups for the novel H1N1 vaccine when it first arrives are pregnant women, household contacts of children under 6 months of age, health care and emergency services personnel, children 6 months and older through adults up to age 24, and persons aged 25 through 64 who are at higher risk for novel H1N1 because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems. After the initial focus, the vaccine is expected to be offered to healthy adults.

A mass immunization program for children may be mounted at schools, and state officials intend to complete this process in the minimum amount of time possible once vaccine arrives. Influenza immunizations will be recommended but not mandated for school students, and written permission will be required before children are immunized in the schools. Specifics will be announced at a later date.

Parents should develop contingency plans in the event that either their children become sick and must stay home or their schools are closed. Stay informed by visiting www.adph.org. This site is updated regularly as information becomes available.