



PIMA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
COMMUNICABLE DISEASE PREVENTION, SUITE 1340
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September 14, 2009

Dear Parents:

The novel H1N1 flu, also known as swine flu, is starting to spread more in our community. Previously, we sent messages to alert you that more flu is expected this year and urged you to take steps to protect yourselves and your children from infection. We will provide notification when there are high levels of flu illness at your child's school.

We would like to take a moment to speak directly to parents of medically frail children. While there are many conditions that can increase the risk for complications from flu, infection in children with the following conditions may increase their risk:

- ❖ Nervous and/or muscular system disorders such as cerebral palsy or uncontrolled seizures
- ❖ Severe lung disease
- ❖ Severe immune system problems such as those due to cancer

Children with these conditions will be a high priority to receive the novel H1N1 flu vaccine once it is available later this fall. Please ask your healthcare provider if it is recommended for your child.

If your child has a serious medical condition, you may wish to give additional thought to keeping your child home from school when the flu is circulating at high levels. We encourage you to discuss this with your child's healthcare provider, and to make plans for the child to be cared for at home should you decide to take them out of school. Consider speaking with your child's teacher(s) to develop a program of home study for the time they may be absent.

Again, the following measures will go a long way toward protecting your family's health in this flu season:

- ▶ **Teach your children to wash their hands** often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub that has at least 60% alcohol. You can set a good example by doing this yourself.
- ▶ **Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes** with tissues or by coughing into the inside of the elbow.
- ▶ **Teach your children not to share personal items** like drinks, food or unwashed utensils.
- ▶ **Know the signs and symptoms of the flu.** Symptoms of the flu include fever of at least 100 degrees Fahrenheit or 37.8 degrees Celsius, cough, sore throat, a runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, and feeling very tired. Some people may also vomit or have diarrhea.
- ▶ **Teach your children to stay 6 feet away** from people who are coughing.
- ▶ **Do not send children to school if they are sick.** Any children who come to school sick or become sick while at school *will be sent home.*
- ▶ **Keep sick children at home** for at least 24 hours *after* they no longer have fever or do not have signs of fever, without using fever-reducing drugs. Keeping children with a fever at home will reduce the number of people who may get infected.
- ▶ **Get the seasonal flu vaccine for all eligible family members! In addition, when the novel H1N1 vaccine becomes available, ask your healthcare provider if it is recommended for your family!**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michelle McDonald, M.D.".

Michelle McDonald, M.D.
Chief Medical Officer