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*Promoting and protecting the health of the public and the environment*

August 27, 2009

Dear Parents/Guardians:

The novel H1N1 flu (swine flu) has continued to affect our state and has been declared a worldwide pandemic. We need your help to prevent the spread of flu among our children.

The novel H1N1 flu (swine flu) spreads the same way that regular seasonal flu viruses spread, mainly through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick with the flu. It also spreads by touching contaminated objects and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu shot each year. We expect that a vaccine to fight the novel H1N1 flu (swine flu) will be available later this year. Please watch for its availability and discuss vaccination for you and your family with your health care provider.

You can also help slow the spread of flu by doing the following:

- Talk with your child about hand washing. Frequent hand washing with soap and warm water helps remove viruses and other germs. Children should wash their hands for about 20 seconds or as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.
- Teach your child to cover her or his mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and then to throw the tissue away. Your child can cough or sneeze into his or her upper sleeve if no tissue is handy. Wash hands afterward.
- Encourage your child to eat healthy foods, exercise, and get plenty of rest.
- Keep your child home if he or she has a fever of 100°F or higher with a cough or sore throat for which there is no known cause. Call your child's school or childcare provider and tell them your child's symptoms. In most cases, your child can return after he or she has been fever free for at least 24 hours **without** taking fever-reducing medications.
- Make sure the school or childcare provider has a way to reach you. Children who become ill with flu-like symptoms at school or with a childcare provider must be sent home.

We greatly appreciate your help and understanding. We will do our best to keep schools and childcare programs open. To help us do this, we encourage you to review the childcare and school exclusion lists on our Web site: [www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/exclusion.htm](http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/exclusion.htm). They list more information about when a child should be kept home. Families should have plans in the event that schools and childcare programs must be closed.

Information on the novel H1N1 flu (swine flu) continues to change quickly. We will do our best to keep you informed. Together we can slow the spread of flu. If you have questions about the novel H1N1 flu (swine flu), please call 211 or your local public health department.

Sincerely,

C. Earl Hunter, Commissioner