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Promoting and protecting the health of the public and the environment

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September 21, 2009

Dear Child Care Administrator:

The Novel H1N1 flu (swine flu) continues to cause illness in South Carolina. I'm writing to ask for your help with slowing the spread of flu among our children.

Most children and adults who have become sick with the Novel H1N1 flu have had mild symptoms that lasted only a few days. Children less than 5 years old, however, are at greater risk of developing serious health problems from the flu. We also must be especially careful to protect infants less than 6 months of age because they are too young to be vaccinated against the flu.

The Novel H1N1 flu spreads just like seasonal flu, through coughs and sneezes. It can also spread when people touch surfaces with flu viruses on them and then touch their eyes, noses or mouths.

Your support is vital. Here are some ways that you can help:

- **Encourage your staff to get immunized against seasonal flu now and the Novel H1N1 flu when it is available.** The best way to prevent the flu is to get immunized. Also, advise parents to talk with their health care provider about getting their families immunized. Visit <http://www.scdhec.gov/flu/clinics.asp> to learn about flu clinics offered by the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) or <http://flucliniclocator.org> for other flu clinics offered by other community providers.
- **Require children and staff to stay home if they have a fever of 100°F or higher with a cough or sore throat.** These are common symptoms of the flu. Children and staff with flu symptoms must stay home until the fever is gone for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications. In most cases children and staff with the flu will miss 3 to 5 days. Consider how policies can be changed to support rather than penalize staff who must miss work because they are ill with the flu. Keep in mind that when symptoms are mild, the employee may not need to see a health care provider. Establish a list of on-call workers to cover for staff who are ill.
- **Check children daily for signs or symptoms of illness. Separate ill children from others until they can be sent home.**

- **Recommend that staff and parents of children who have flu-like symptoms see their health care provider right away if they are at high risk for complications from the flu.** Early treatment with antiviral medications may help lessen the symptoms. Those at high risk include:
 - children younger than 5 years old;
 - children younger than 18 years who are on long-term aspirin treatment;
 - children and adults who have chronic conditions such as asthma and diabetes or other lung, heart, liver, blood, neurologic, neuromuscular, or metabolic disorders;
 - children and adults with weak immune systems
 - pregnant women; and
 - people aged 65 years or older.
- **Promote hand washing.** Hands should be washed frequently with soap and warm water for about 20 seconds – about as long as it takes to sing the alphabet song. Assist children with hand washing before meals, after toileting, after coughing or sneezing, and at other times when their hands are soiled.
- **Teach children and staff to cover their mouths and noses with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and then to throw the tissue away.** Wash hands afterward. Have tissue and a trash can readily available in each area.
- **Clean your child care environment carefully using the products that you would normally.** Pay special attention to toys and play areas.

It is important that you continue to follow the requirements of DHEC and the Department of Social Services (DSS) for reporting flu or flu-like illnesses among children and staff in your facility. The criteria for reporting outbreaks of illnesses due to flu or a flu-like illness to DHEC are outlined in the 2009-2010 Childcare Exclusion List. The Exclusion List is located on the DHEC Web site at <http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/exclusion.htm>.

Information on the novel H1N1 flu continues to change quickly. We will do all we can to keep you informed. Meanwhile, if you have questions about the novel H1N1 flu, please see our Web site (<http://www.scdhec.gov/flu>) or call 211.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support. Our children and their families are depending on us.

Sincerely,



C. Earl Hunter
Commissioner

Attachment