

SAN ANTONIO METROPOLITAN HEALTH DISTRICT



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Dear Center Director:

Child Care Providers will play an important role in protecting young children during the current flu season. The novel H1N1 influenza virus, previously known as the "swine flu," has continued to circulate over the summer months and, as expected, the community is experiencing an increase in influenza-like illnesses now that the new school year has begun. With traditional seasonal flu viruses returning later in the fall and the continued presence of the H1N1 virus, the impact of flu-like illness could be considerable.

When the novel H1N1 outbreak was first detected in mid-April 2009, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began working with states and local health departments such as Metro Health to collect, compile, and analyze information regarding the outbreak, including the numbers of cases and the ages of people afflicted. According to the CDC, children less than 5 years of age are at increased risk of complications from the novel H1N1 flu virus. The risk is even greater among children less than 2 years of age. Infants less than 6 months of age are particularly vulnerable since they are too young to receive the seasonal or novel H1N1 flu vaccinations. **For this reason, the caregivers of infants under six months of age are among the targeted population to receive the novel H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available.**

Recently, the CDC issued the updated *Guidance on Helping Child Care and Early Childhood Programs Respond to Influenza during the 2009-2010 Influenza Season*, which is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/childcare/guidance.htm>. The purpose of the document is to provide guidance for reducing the spread of influenza in early childhood settings. In addition to the guidance document, the communication toolkit found at that website contains valuable information that can be used to communicate with parents, teachers and staff. Among other things, it includes templates of letters for parents, fact sheets and posters reminding parents to keep their children home if ill.

Early childhood providers can make a significant impact on the health of their communities by reminding children, families and staff about both types of influenza, proper hygiene habits, the importance of staying home when ill and encouraging vaccination with both the seasonal influenza and novel H1N1 vaccines. I encourage you to take these steps as part of a proactive approach to prevent the spread of novel H1N1 influenza among your clientele and staff.

Sincerely,

Fernando A. Guerra, M.D., M.P.H.
Director of Health