

SAN ANTONIO METROPOLITAN HEALTH DISTRICT



332 West Commerce
San Antonio, Texas 78205-2489
PHONE (210) 207-8780 FAX (210) 207-8999

September 16, 2009

Dear Bexar County School Officials:

Thank you for your continued support of the ongoing Novel Influenza A H1N1 (swine flu) response efforts across our community. Since the emergence of the virus last April, Metro Health has continued to work closely with our federal, state, and local partners to monitor and respond to new guidance to control the spread of the virus. While we have seen that the Novel H1N1 virus has become wide spread across the globe, the severity of illness for most cases has fortunately been mild. In fact, most cases in our area and across the nation have been self-limited without the need for healthcare intervention.

Given this pattern of illness the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and state and local health departments have shifted the emphasis of activities from individual case finding to a focus on community-wide prevention strategies including preparations for vaccination. As we have discussed in recent meetings and conference calls the following points should be communicated to school personnel and families to help them understand current efforts in Bexar County and some changes from our initial response protocols during the Spring of 2009.

- Health departments across the country, including Metro Health, are no longer tracking individual suspected cases of Novel H1N1 Influenza as the virus is widespread. However, Metro Health is using a network of surveillance sites to monitor the overall patterns of illness in our community and tracking severe cases through hospitals. To be consistent with national recommendations, Metro Health will not provide notifications to schools of individual cases of Novel H1N1 Influenza.
- Symptoms of the Novel H1N1 Influenza are generally the same as typical seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Our surveillance suggests that the vast majority of influenza like illness (ILI) cases in Bexar County at this time are Novel H1N1 Influenza as we have not yet entered the typical flu season. However, the strategies for controlling both Novel H1N1 Influenza and seasonal influenza in the community are the same:
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
 - Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Students, faculty or school staff that have influenza like illness should stay at home and avoid contact with others until at least 24 hours after their fever is gone (without the use of fever reducing medicines). This is a critical component of limiting the spread of illness. Metro Health does not recommend requiring return to work/school clearances from healthcare providers unless there is an apparent pattern of absence for a particular student.
- At this time, and consistent with national guidance, Metro Health does not recommend the closure of schools, cancellation of public gatherings, or any interruptions of normal community activities due to Novel H1N1 Influenza. If a change in the pattern of illness is identified locally or nationally, schools and other local leaders will be notified and appropriate preventive measures will be taken.

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- Information about Novel H1N1 and guidance can be found on the Metro Health website at www.sanantonio.gov/health and questions can be answered during business hours through our flu hotline at 210-207-5779.

Based on our surveillance data and observations of other communities, we anticipate that cases are likely to increase in the coming weeks and months both due to continued transmission of Novel H1N1 and then the arrival of seasonal influenza. Metro Health is continuing to develop opportunities to work with schools and universities throughout the community, as well as healthcare providers, businesses, and community partners to limit the spread of influenza.

In particular we are developing our plans to distribute the Novel H1N1 vaccine to the community and look forward to working with you to provide this important intervention to your students and their families. We appreciate the role of schools in coordinating community resources and hope that you will be able to encourage the participation of staff and families within your districts to volunteer to support these important activities.

Thank you for your continued partnership and your ongoing commitment to the health and safety of your students, faculty and staff. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you should have questions, concerns or recommendations for our department.

Sincerely,

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