



**EL PASO COUNTY DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT**
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Aug. 10, 2009

Dear Parent:

As the public health director for El Paso County, it is my duty to tell you that I am very concerned about the re-emergence of the novel H1N1 flu, which began to circulate in our community and throughout the world this spring. You may have concerns as well.

Here's what the community is facing: H1N1 flu will continue to make people sick this fall and winter at the same time that seasonal flu re-emerges in the community. These two viruses will cause similar symptoms: sudden onset of fever, cough, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, chills, fatigue, and sometimes, diarrhea and vomiting. Both have the potential to be serious. We are especially concerned about school aged children because they are among the ages most affected by H1N1 flu so far.

In order to better protect the health of your child and the community, the Health Department has asked your school to exercise additional caution in regard to sick children. Flu spreads easily through the air and from contact with surfaces. So children not feeling well or manifesting symptoms of illness will be sent home and may not return until they are well. Your school may ask about your child's symptoms. This helps the Health Department to monitor the level of flu-like illness. We need only the number ill, not their names.

Now is a good time to make arrangements for the care of sick children in your home. We suggest you talk to your employer now about the possibility of missed work for this purpose and/or that you make other arrangements for care. Similarly, please set a good example: Stay home from work or activities if you are sick.

This action is necessary to protect your family and the community from the spread of disease. One reason that public health professionals are worried about H1N1 are because humans have no immunity to it and because H1H1 flu has the potential to mix with other viruses as it circles the globe and become more serious.

In addition, please follow these steps this fall and winter to protect yourself, your family and the community:

- **Make sure your family receives the seasonal flu vaccine** when it becomes available. Seasonal flu vaccine will likely not provide protection against H1N1 flu, but it's important to be well if exposed to H1N1 flu.
- **Get the H1N1 flu vaccine** when it becomes available, subject to priorities being formulated now.
- **Wash your hands properly and often**, and ensure that your children do, too. Wash with warm water and soap at least 20 seconds and/or use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.
- **Model coughing or sneezing** into elbows or tissues for your children—not into your hands. Teach children not to touch their eyes, noses and mouth to prevent spread of germs. Wash hands after coughing or sneezing.
- **Ask child care providers** and others around your family to get flu shots.
- **Prepare medicine and food supplies**, along with books, games and other materials so it's easier for you and/or your children to stay home when sick.
- **Visit the Health Department's Web site**, www.elpasocountyhealth.org, for updates, instruction and guidance on how to care for a sick person at home and other topics.

We all share the responsibility to protect our children, families and community. Thank you for helping!

Sincerely,

Kandi Buckland, R.N., M.P.A.
Public Health Director