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June 17, 2009

Dear Parent:

On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic of the H1N1 influenza (swine flu) virus. As of June 15, 2009, the Albany County Department of Health started to receive reports of increased influenza-like illness (ILI) in the community. As seasonal flu is not common at this time of year, it is believed that the cause of ILI is the H1N1 virus, and that H1N1 is prevalent in the Capital Region at this time.

As this is a new virus and most of us are susceptible, the illness can become widespread and we could see continued waves of H1N1 influenza appearing during the summer and into the fall and winter. Initial data indicates the largest number of H1N1 cases have occurred in people between the ages of 5 and 24 years old.

Most illness seen thus far due to this new virus is mild, similar to previous seasonal influenza. As is true with seasonal influenza, individuals with underlying medical conditions are at greatest risk for complications if they get H1N1 influenza. While there is no vaccine available to prevent H1N1 influenza at this time, most people will recover without medication, and antiviral medication may be prescribed by a physician if warranted.

It is important to follow the following common sense precautions to prevent exposure to and spread of influenza.

- Teach your children to wash their hands often with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds (or while singing "Happy Birthday" twice) frequently throughout the day, after using the toilet, and before and after eating.
- Teach your children proper use of hand sanitizers (gels, rubs, wipes). These work well if they contain 60% alcohol and should be used cautiously with younger children.
- Teach your children to keep from touching their face, mouth, nose or eyes.
- Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of their elbow.

If you or your child develop symptoms of influenza, such as a fever of greater than 100.4 with either a cough or sore throat, you may have H1N1 virus. Mild illness can be cared for at home. It is advisable to check with your healthcare provider about any special care that might be needed if an individual is under the age of 5 or over 65, pregnant or has a health condition such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, or other chronic health conditions.

As the school year comes to a close, we realize most children will be involved in a variety of activities involving other children, including summer camps. The New York State Health Department has provided guidance on H1N1 to all summer camps in the state. This letter, in addition to informing about H1N1 circulating in the community, is also to make you aware of this guidance, in order to best protect and prepare your family as you head into summer.

This message is of the utmost importance if you are sending your child to any type of camp this season.

Camps play a critical role in protecting the health of their campers, staff and community from contagious diseases such as H1N1 (swine flu). All members of the camp community including parents and campers must take an active role in limiting the spread of infection.

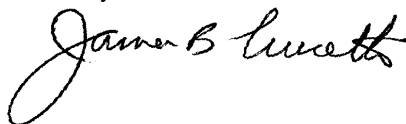
*****This means children who are ill should stay at home and not come to camp*****

- Campers or staff at home who are ill with flu-like symptoms (fever $\geq 100^{\circ}$ F with cough or sore throat) should stay at home and not come to camp. They should not go into the community except for medical care for at least 7 days after the start of their illness or until they are symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer.
- New campers and staff will be screened as they arrive at camp for flu-like symptoms and may be sent home if ill.
- Day campers and staff who have flu-like symptoms should be excluded from camp activities and sent home. They should stay at home for at least 7 days after the start of illness or until they are symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer.
- Overnight campers who develop flu-like symptoms while at camp will be separated from well campers and staff and excluded from camp activities for at least 7 days after the start of illness or until they are symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer. These campers may be sent home during short camp sessions.


Following these guidelines will help to reduce the spread of H1N1 and provide a safer and healthier summer and camp experience.

For further information on H1N1 influenza, including other guidance and updates, please visit our website: www.albanycounty.com/health

Sincerely,



James B. Crucetti, MD, MPH
Commissioner of Health



Elizabeth F. Whalen, MD
Medical Director