



Illinois State Board of Education

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Jesse H. Ruiz
Chairman

Christopher A. Koch, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Education

August 18, 2009

Dear Parents:

We are writing today to encourage you to have your children vaccinated against seasonal flu and H1N1 influenza viruses. Vaccinations are the most effective way to protect your children, and their classmates, from these potentially serious diseases.

Each year, 1 in 5 Americans are infected by seasonal flu and 36,000 die from flu-related causes. In general, anyone who wants to reduce their chances of getting seasonal flu should get vaccinated in September, or as soon as the vaccine is available. There are, however, certain people who are more susceptible to seasonal flu, including children between 6 months and 18 years of age, who are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated each year. The seasonal flu vaccine is safe and effective in both shot and nasal spray forms, but minor side effects can occur, which may include soreness, fever and aches.

In addition to the seasonal flu, this year a new influenza virus, H1N1 (formerly called swine flu), has caused widespread illness, ranging from mild to severe in the United States, Illinois and around the world. H1N1 began circulating in the spring and experts at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) believe it will continue to cause illness during the upcoming flu season, which usually begins in the fall and lasts until the spring. H1N1 influenza has been particularly severe in children because they lack immunity to the virus and are considered at high risk of infection.

The federal government is currently working to develop a vaccine for the H1N1 influenza virus and the CDC recommends that children between 6 months and 18 years of age receive the H1N1 vaccine. The H1N1 vaccine is expected to be available in mid-October and children will likely need two doses of the vaccine, either a shot or nasal spray, spaced about three weeks apart.

We urge you to speak with your doctor or local health department about where you may obtain vaccinations for your children and any other questions about seasonal flu or H1N1 influenza. You can also keep informed about the flu at www.ready.illinois.gov or www.flu.gov.

Please, vaccinate your children; it is the best defense that you can give them against these two possibly serious diseases.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Christopher A. Koch in black ink.

Christopher A. Koch, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Education

Handwritten signature of Damon T. Arnold in black ink.

Damon T. Arnold, M.D., M.P.H.
Director, Illinois Department of Public Health