



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Public Health and County Schools Join to Protect Children Against H1N1 Flu**

The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department and Santa Barbara County School Superintendents are communicating regularly about school absenteeism and developing approaches together to prevent the spread of pandemic H1N1 influenza in our schools and to protect the most vulnerable children from severe illness.

The Santa Barbara County Health Officer, Dr. Peter Hasler, has been speaking with school officials about H1N1 flu and its impact on the schools. Together they have reviewed the steps the schools are taking to prevent the spread of this disease. These include:

- Providing educational materials to staff, students and parents
- Excluding children who are sick
- Maintaining student and staff hygiene
- Cleaning facilities and classrooms
- Screening students for fever and cough

Healthy children may attend school even if there is a sick parent or sibling at home. However, at the first sign of illness, the County Health Officer recommends a child stay home. Children may return to school when the fever has been gone for 24 hours without medicines and they are ready to participate in classroom activities.

### **Children With At Risk Medical Conditions**

Many school children have medical conditions that potentially increase their risk of severe disease and complications from H1N1 flu infection. They may appear healthy and participate fully in regular education activities. The parents of these children should contact their healthcare providers to discuss their child's risk and obtain advice on how to respond to illness.

### **Medically Fragile Children**

With an increased rate of influenza-like illness on many school sites, special precautions are being taken for **medically fragile children** including:

- The Health Officer and School Superintendents developed plans to address the special needs of medically fragile children. These include:
  - Notifying parents of the importance of vaccines and seeking prompt medical attention.
  - Considering protocols for protective isolation and dismissal.
  - Consulting with Public Health to assess situations and decide on action steps.
- The Health Officer will consider recommending dismissal of special day classes for children with substantial disabilities and medical fragility. The factors that will be taken into account are:
  - A rate of influenza-like illnesses in the classroom that places the remaining children and staff at an unacceptable risk of developing or contracting infection.
  - The absence, due to illness, of critical, expertly trained and necessary staff prevents the ability of the classroom to provide direct care, support and education of the students.
  - The individual needs and risks of specific students.

Bill Cirone, Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools noted, “The schools of Santa Barbara County are extremely grateful for the direction and support provided by the county's Public Health Department in taking the steps necessary to help keep all children safe, and most particularly at-risk students who are medically fragile and have special needs. By keeping lines of communication open between public health, the schools, the parents, and members of the community, we are able to focus on the health and safety precautions and protocols that are so vital to student safety during this pandemic.”

Questions may be directed to the PHD H1N1 Public Hotline at 1-888-722-6358. Additional information is on the PHD website: [www.sbcfluinfo.org](http://www.sbcfluinfo.org) or follow us on twitter at SBCTPublicHealth.

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