Background: During the spring 2009 H1N1 outbreak, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recognized the importance of having a mechanism in place to collect information about school dismissals, and the number of students and teachers affected to gauge the impact of the outbreak. The CDC does not currently recommend school closures as an effective response to the novel H1N1 (swine) influenza pandemic, or the 2009-2010 influenza season. However, it is possible that the recommendation could change as the season progresses, or that some schools may dismiss classes if the number of absent students and staff affect the functioning of the school.

The ED and the CDC – in collaboration with state health departments including the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) – are implementing a school dismissal monitoring system for the 2009-2010 influenza season. This monitoring system will generate a daily summary that will provide the total number of dismissed schools nationwide, the total number of students and teachers impacted, and list the states with school closures or dismissals. The ED and CDC will release only national summary data each afternoon; individual schools or school districts will not be named.

Reporting School Dismissals: A school dismissal will be defined as any instance of a public or private school with any of grades K-12 that dismissed all students (but not staff) for 1 or more days and any instance when an entire school building with any of grades K-12 was completely closed to all students and staff in response to:

- confirmed or suspected case(s) of novel influenza A (H1N1) infection;
- an unusually high number of student or teacher absences due to influenza-like illness (ILI) that interfered with the school’s ability to function;
- community or administrative interest in cleaning and sanitizing school facilities regardless of the presence of a confirmed or suspected case of novel influenza A (H1N1) infection or ILI among students and staff;
- or any other aspect of a community’s response to the novel influenza A (H1N1) virus

Schools and school districts are encouraged to report school dismissals to the CDC, MSDH and The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). A common reporting form has been created by the CDC that requires only the name and zip code of the school or school district, the date the school first dismisses students, and the projected date the school plans to re-open. Individual schools or school districts may complete the form via the web (www.cdc.gov/FluSchoolDismissal), email (FluSchoolDismissal@cdc.gov) or fax (770.488.6156). School dismissals reported to the CDC will be sent simultaneously to the MSDH Epidemiology Program. A link to the CDC school dismissal reporting form is provided on the MSDH website at www.healthyms.com. Please contact Estelle Watts, MDE School Nurse Consultant at 601-359-1737 regarding school closures. You may also visit the Office of Healthy Schools Web site at www.healthyschoolsms.org.
Your assistance with the implementation of this reporting system is appreciated. Please call the MSDH Epidemiology Program during regular business hours at 601.576.7725 (1.800.556.0003 outside of the Jackson area) with questions.

Sincerely,

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