Dear Parent,

Novel H1N1 (swine) flu has been diagnosed in children in several schools around the state. While this is an unusual time of year for the flu to be circulating throughout Mississippi, the new flu virus causes an illness similar to what we see every year in the winter and early spring months; its severity and duration of illness are like seasonal flu.

Novel H1N1 (swine) flu is an illness that usually includes fever with cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, and possibly nausea, diarrhea and/or vomiting. Most people - children and adults - who are otherwise healthy will completely recover in a few days. However, certain people are at higher risk of serious complications from the flu, including pneumonia and hospitalizations. This includes pregnant women and children younger than five years old (especially those under two years old), and anyone with chronic heart or lung problems (including asthma). If your child or anyone else in the family fits in any of these high risk groups and develops the flu, call your primary healthcare provider for further instructions and guidance. Your health care provider will decide whether antiviral drugs are needed to treat you or your child.

Even if your child is not in one of the high risk groups, you should watch for emergency warning signs in your child that may indicate the need to seek medical attention immediately.

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

The flu is spread from one person to another through small droplets from the nose and mouth of an ill person (just like flu is spread during the winter flu season). These tiny droplets can also spread the virus onto surfaces, where it can survive for a few hours.

When taking care of a sick child at home, there are important ways to protect yourself and others who are not sick:

- Keep your sick child away from others as much as possible
- Remind your child to cover their coughs, and wash their hands often with soap and water (or alcohol-based hand rubs), especially after coughing or sneezing
• Keep your sick child in a room separate from the common areas of the house, if possible
• Keep your child home for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone, except for medical care
  (Fever should be gone without the use of fever-reducing medications)

Do not give aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) to children or teenagers who have the flu; this can cause a rare
but serious illness called Reye's syndrome.

The vaccine against novel H1N1 (swine) flu will be available soon. The Mississippi State Department of
Health is working with the Department of Education and with individual schools to provide vaccine free
of charge for your children. Information about the vaccine and consent forms will be sent home for you
to read and sign prior to the vaccination days in your child’s school. In addition, parents are encouraged
to have their children vaccinated against regular seasonal flu.

For further information, parents may call the State Department of Health’s hotline at 1-877-222-9FLU (1-
877-222-9358) or visit the Mississippi State Department of Health’s website at www.HealthyMS.com.

Sincerely,

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