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Division of Health

## H1N1 AND SEASONAL INFLUENZA GUIDANCE FOR CHILD PLACING AGENCIES

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This document provides guidance to assist child placing agencies (CPA) in reducing the spread of H1N1 and seasonal influenza (flu) among program staff and the children and families they serve. These recommendations are based on the assumption that the severity of illness will remain similar to what was seen during the spring and summer of 2009. However, flu is unpredictable and additional steps may be necessary should flu conditions become more severe. Since conditions may vary across the state, agencies are encouraged to maintain regular communication with their local health department to obtain information and guidance specific to their area.

### Recommendations for all Individuals

Symptoms of H1N1 flu are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever greater than 100 degrees, body aches, coughing, sore throat, respiratory congestion and in some cases, diarrhea and vomiting. Individuals with flu-like illness should stay home, rest and drink plenty of fluids so that they can recover without spreading the illness to others. Sick children should not attend school, child care or another group setting. All sick individuals should stay home until they have been fever free, without the use of fever-reducing medications for at least 24 hours.

As with any flu virus, individuals are encouraged to take the following steps to reduce the spread of disease:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water. Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer when soap and running water are not available. Remember to wash your hands **before** preparing or serving food, inserting or removing contact lens or treating wounds and cuts. Wash hands **after** coughing or sneezing, using the bathroom, caring for a sick person or after contact with a potentially sick person.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing and sneezing. Cough into your sleeve if a tissue is not available. Throw used tissues in the trash.
- Stay healthy by eating a balanced diet, drinking plenty of water and getting adequate rest.
- Get vaccinated against the flu. The annual seasonal flu vaccine is available now and all individuals, especially those at increased risk of complications from flu, should get their vaccination as soon as possible. A vaccine to protect against the 2009 H1N1 influenza (flu) virus is in production and will be available beginning in October. Initial target groups to receive this vaccine include:
  - Pregnant women.
  - Household contacts and caregivers of infants younger than 6 months of age
  - All children and young adults ages 6 months through 24 years
  - Health care personnel
  - People ages 25-64 years with high-risk medical conditions

## Recommendations for Child Placing Agencies

Child Placing Agencies should review and update, as needed, their current crisis management plans and develop contingency plans to deal with possible disruptions in child placing activities and to cover staff shortages due to illness. These plans should be shared with clients, foster families and staff.

Records of children in out of home placement, foster families, clients and staff should be reviewed and updated. Be sure that current contact information and health histories, as required, are available.

Review and revise, if needed, sick leave policies to remove barriers to staff staying home when sick or to care for a sick family member. Do not require a doctor's note to confirm illness or recovery. Doctor's offices may be very busy and not able to provide such documentation.

Staff with flu-like illness should not work and should remain at home until they have been fever free, without the use of fever-reducing medications for at least 24 hours.

Encourage all staff and all household members of family foster homes sponsored by your agency to be vaccinated for seasonal flu and when available, H1N1 flu. Note: children, 6 months of age and older and some household members of foster homes will fall within the target groups identified by CDC to receive the initial doses of the H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available.

Make sure that restroom facilities and hand sinks in agency offices are stocked with hand soap and paper towels.

CPA staff providing family support services or working with foster families should provide families with information to reduce the spread of flu, including steps to take should a foster child or family member have a flu-like illness. A useful planning tool for individuals and families is available at <http://flu.gov/plan/individual/checklists.html>. Additional resource materials to share with families are available at <http://cdc.gov/h1n1flu/flyers.htm> and at <http://www.kdheks.gov/H1N1>. Many of the available materials are low literacy and available in other languages.

CPA staff making home visits in family foster homes should provide consultation on the importance of good hand washing and respiratory hygiene practices and should check to be sure the home has basic supplies including: hand soap, facial tissues, trash containers for used tissues and necessary cleaning supplies. Other topics of discussion should include plans for the isolation of sick household members from other residents of the home, when to seek medical care and back up plans in the event of school or child care closures.

The KDHE website at <http://www.kdheks.gov/H1N1> contains additional materials and updated resources. Agencies are encouraged to check the website regularly.



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