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www.health.ri.gov

Date: October 13, 2009
To: Parents of School-Aged Children
From: Director of Health, David R. Gifford, MD, MPH
Re: Flu Information for Parents

Both seasonal flu and H1N1 flu will cause illness in Rhode Island this flu season. You can use the information here to learn about the flu and keep your children healthy this fall and winter. The Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH) will work with Rhode Island schools to provide information to parents throughout the flu season. For up-to-date flu information, please visit <http://www.health.ri.gov/flu/> or call HEALTH'S H1N1 Information Line at 401-222-8022.

Flu Vaccination

There are two different flu vaccines this year, one for seasonal flu and one for H1N1 flu. HEALTH strongly recommends that your child receive both vaccines this year. Children and adolescents can receive the **seasonal** flu shot or nasal-spray flu vaccine at their doctors' offices. High school students can also get the seasonal flu shot through the *Vaccinate Before You Graduate* program in high schools. Children in grades K-12 will receive the H1N1 flu shot through school-based vaccination clinics, while younger children can receive the H1N1 flu shot or nasal-spray flu vaccine at their doctors' offices.

Flu Prevention

In addition to vaccination, you can prevent the spread of flu by washing your hands often with soap and warm water or using alcohol-based hand gels. Cough and sneeze into your elbow or into a tissue, and avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

Stay Home When Sick

Children and adults with flu-like symptoms should stay home until they have been fever-free (temperature less than 100°F or 37.8°C) for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications such as Tylenol.

Flu Symptoms

Flu-like symptoms include fever greater than 100°F, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, diarrhea, and vomiting. Infants and young children are less likely to have typical flu symptoms than older children. They may have fever and seem very tired, but they may not have a cough, sore throat, or other symptoms.

Flu Treatment

People who do not need to be seen by a doctor should stay home, rest, and drink plenty of fluids. Talk to your doctor before giving over-the-counter cold medications to children younger than 4 years old. **Children and adolescents younger than 19 years of age should not be given aspirin to treat the flu.**

Antiviral Drugs

Antiviral drugs (such as Tamiflu and Relenza) can treat both seasonal flu and H1N1 flu in adults and children. They need to be prescribed by a doctor, and they work best when started during the first 2 days of illness. Antiviral drugs are most appropriate for people with severe illness and for people at high risk of flu-related complications. Most people who get the flu will have mild illness and will recover without needing antiviral drugs or medical care.

When to Call Your Doctor

Most people who get the flu will have mild illness and will recover without needing medical care. Consider calling your doctor for advice if you or your children have flu-like symptoms and:

- You are at high risk of flu-related complications (see next section).
- You have any questions or concerns about your illness.
- Your fever does not get better after 3 days, or after you start to get better, you get worse again.

People at High Risk of Flu-Related Complications

People at high risk of flu-related complications include:

- Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2
- People 65 years and older
- Pregnant women
- People who have:
 - Cancer, diabetes, or heart disease
 - Blood disorders (including sickle cell disease), kidney disorders, or liver disorders
 - Chronic lung disease (including asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
 - Neurological disorders (including nervous system, brain, or spinal cord)
 - Neuromuscular disorders (including muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis)
 - Weakened immune systems (including children with HIV/AIDS)

Most people with high-risk conditions who get the flu will recover uneventfully and will not need additional medical care.

Emergency Warning Signs

The following emergency warning signs require immediate medical attention:

In Children:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish color on skin or around mouth and lips
- Dehydration (no tears, dried lips and mouth, not drinking enough fluids)
- 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 a worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In Adults:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting