



For more information contact:
Toby D. Wagoner
West Virginia Immunization Program
Telephone: (304) 558-6438

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H1N1 cases likely in schools across the region

H1N1 continues to circulate across West Virginia and many parents of school age children are asking if H1N1 is in their child's school. The answer is, "It very well could be" said Dr. Cathy Slemp, acting state health officer with the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health.

"While flu-like-illness levels overall are well below what's seen during traditional flu season, we certainly are seeing flu cases within communities now. Most all current flu in communities is caused by the 2009 H1N1 virus," Dr. Slemp said. "Since this virus easily infects younger people, that includes cases in schools. None of us should be surprised by that," she added. She cautioned that there are also a great many rumors and misinformation and encouraged people to stay connected to information from their local health department, the WVDHHR and CDC websites.

WVDHHR and WVDE have shared the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) school guidance for both preventing and managing cases of flu with schools across the state. They have received many reports of schools following guidance closely. In addition to promoting good disease prevention measures, parents should be sure to keep ill children home until fever is gone for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication. If they receive a call from the school to come pick up their child, it is important to do so. If their child is at increased risk of flu complications (young infants or children with asthma or other lung disease, heart or kidney problems, diabetes, neurologic or neuromuscular problems, or a weakened immune system) they should call their health care provider early if the child develops fever and respiratory symptoms. This helps evaluate the need for being seen or treated with medications. Healthy individuals with mild illness typically manage flu illness fine at home with supportive care.

Slemp noted that we are early into the flu season and many more cases are likely to surface over the coming months. Slemp added, that individuals should get the seasonal and H1N1 vaccines when they become available.

More information is available at www.wvflu.org, www.wvdhhr.org and www.cdc.gov or, by calling your local health department.