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PRESS RELEASE: Clusters of H1N1 (Swine Component) Flu Identified in Niagara County School Children

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From: Elaine Roman, Director of Public Health Planning and Information/Emergency Preparedness

The Niagara County Department of Health (NCDOH) has received laboratory reports confirming five new cases of novel H1N1 influenza A in school-aged children, and one probable case in a pre-school aged child. The children's ages range from three to fourteen years old. Three children from Barker have fully recovered and returned to school. Three other children from Niagara Falls are not in school, and still recovering from the illness.

Despite the sudden increase in cases, schools have not reported any significant spikes in absenteeism to NCDOH. New guidelines released by the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) on June 16, 2009, discourage testing and treatment of mild isolated cases of influenza-like-illness (ILI), except in individuals with underlying medical conditions.

The CDC defines the H1N1 infectious period as one day before the onset of flu symptoms until seven days after. Therefore, parents should plan to keep their children home and away from others for at least seven days after onset of ILI.

The CDC reports that the largest number of H1N1 cases overall, occurred in people five to twenty-four years of age. No children, and few adults under age sixty have demonstrated any immunity to the H1N1 virus.

The Niagara County Department of Health continues to ramp up H1N1 efforts to address the current situation and to prepare for the fall flu season. Production of a new H1N1 vaccine is slated to begin in July, and may be available as early as October.

Disease control nurses conduct daily active surveillance for influenza-like-illnesses with all Niagara County hospitals and schools. County health officers are in communication with response agencies, universities, businesses, adult care facilities, daycares and other partners.

The Novel H1N1 flu virus is spread from human to human in the same manner as seasonal flu. The virus is different from the still-circulating seasonal flu virus, which can cause mild to severe respiratory disease. Overall, H1N1 illnesses in the US have been relatively mild. Most H1N1-infected individuals who died from complications, had pre-existing medical conditions. The same groups that are at increased risk for complications from seasonal flu, are at increased risk for H1N1-related flu complications.

Signs and Symptoms of H1N1 Swine Flu infection are similar to seasonal flu, with fever greater than 100°, headache, sore throat, body aches, and may also include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Antiviral medications can prevent infection or ease symptoms, but are not effective if given later than two days after the onset of ILI symptoms.

People can take the following steps to reduce the risk of H1N1, or any other respiratory infection:

- Cover coughs and sneezes with a sleeve or disposable tissue. Dispose of tissues in a wastebasket and immediately cleanse the hands.
- Wash hands often and vigorously with soap and water for fifteen to twenty seconds, especially after coughing, sneezing or blowing the nose, before and after eating, after using the bathroom, and ALWAYS before touching or caring for infants, elderly or chronically ill. Use waterless alcohol-based hand sanitizer when hand-washing facilities are unavailable.
- Keep hands away from eyes, nose and mouth. Many respiratory infections are picked up by touching the eyes with fingers contaminated by viruses.
- Stay home if sick with flu-like symptoms; keep ill children home from school or daycare.
- Avoid unnecessary contact with individuals who show signs of respiratory illness.

The New York State Department of Health has established a Novel H1N1 Hotline that can provide additional information to concerned individuals. The Hotline number is **1-800- 808-1987**.

Further information on Swine Flu can be found at:

www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/communicable/influenza/pandemic/index.htm

Niagara County has posted Novel H1N1 Flu information on the website at www.niagaracounty.com