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PRESS RELEASE: H1N1 Swine Flu

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

The Niagara County Department of Health is working with Chief Public Officials to ramp up preparedness efforts for Swine Flu, a novel (new type) of Influenza A. For over eight years, Niagara County has been planning, training and exercising with our partners and community volunteers to build resources, competencies and readiness for all-hazards, infectious disease outbreaks and flu pandemics.

The Niagara County Department of Health constantly conducts active surveillance for influenza-like respiratory illnesses with all Niagara County Hospitals and is in communication with response agencies, schools, universities, businesses, adult care facilities and daycares.

The Swine Flu H1N1 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. H1N1 illnesses in the US have been relatively mild with no deaths. To date, one person in the U.S was hospitalized because of Swine Flu, had a serious pre-existing medical condition prior to infection, and has fully recovered. At this time, the Department of Health has not identified any Swine Flu infections in Niagara County or Upstate New York.

Signs and Symptoms of H1N1 Swine Flu infection are similar to seasonal flu, with fever greater than 100°, headache, sore throat, body aches, but may also include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Currently, no vaccine is available to prevent Swine Flu. Specific antiviral medications to prevent or ease symptoms must be given within 2 days of illness. These medications will only be available to individuals who are linked to cases of Swine Flu that have been confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Laboratory.

Individuals can take the following steps to reduce the risk of any respiratory infection, including Swine Flu:

- Cover coughs or sneezes with a sleeve or tissue.
- Wash hands often and vigorously with soap and water, 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.

PUBLIC HEALTH: PREVENT. PROMOTE. PROTECT.

- 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 Swine Flu 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 plans to post Swine Flu information on the website early tomorrow at www.niagaracounty.com