



CHARLIE CRIST
GOVERNOR

August 13, 2009

Dear Superintendents,

My administration is committed to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of the people of Florida. As our state has proven in the face of severe weather and hurricanes, the wisest course of action always involves thorough planning and preparation. For that reason, I am joining with State Surgeon General Dr. Ana Viamonte Ros and Education Commissioner Dr. Eric Smith to ask you to take action to ensure the safety and well-being of Florida students as our schools begin another school year.

Earlier this year, we faced a unique challenge to our state with the emergence of a novel strain of influenza, now known as H1N1 Swine Flu. Over the summer, health officials tracked the virus in Florida, and watched it progress through the Southern Hemisphere. During the spring, the virus focused itself primarily in those ages 5 to 24, and we now have seen outbreaks in summer camps, child care centers, and other locations where groups of children congregate. Therefore, we have reason to believe this new flu strain has the ability to track directly into the school systems, commencing with the beginning of the school year. The Departments of Education and Health have been planning at the state level to assist local operations since the emergence of H1N1 Swine Flu in Florida in May, and would like to take this opportunity to advise you of several key issues.

As with any situation involving the health of their children, parents have concerns about H1N1 Swine Flu and the steps needed to keep their children safe. We have attached for your consideration a sample "Dear Parent" letter that covers a variety of issues for them. Given the natural association for parents to identify with their local leaders, the letter has been designed for your letterhead use and signature.

In the spring, national guidance provided that school dismissal was to be considered as the first option to slow the spread of this new strain. After much analysis, officials have updated their guidance to include that while school dismissal may still occur, it should be considered only after less stringent steps are taken. This comprehensive guidance is available at <http://www.flu.gov/plan/school/index.html>. Decisions to close schools can have statewide effects, and we now are developing a data collection tool that will enable us to document the events as they occur. This tool will be provided to you very soon.

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Our Federal partners are getting very close to the manufacture of a vaccine to immunize against H1N1 Swine Flu, and they anticipate it to become available later this fall. The vaccine will first be provided to individuals in the highest risk categories as noted by our Federal partners, and then to the rest of our population. Your local County Health Department is the lead for the Department of Health in these matters, and we advise you to contact them regarding vaccination plans, if this communication has not already occurred. In the coming months, representatives of your local County Health Department will be working with local government officials, including school superintendents, regarding the determination of appropriate local vaccination sites. We encourage school district officials to take an active role in determining those locations.

Finally, education is one of the key components of our H1N1 Swine Flu mitigation strategy. To assist in this effort, a variety of age-appropriate posters will soon be available with information about hand washing and cough etiquette. You can also learn more at www.MyFluSafety.com.

By working together, we will educate Floridians on how to help reduce transmission of the H1N1 Swine Flu virus, and help you continue your mission of keeping your students safe and learning.

We look forward to assisting you in this endeavor.

Sincerely,



Charlie Crist
Governor



Ana Viamonte Ros, MD, MPH
State Surgeon General



Eric J Smith, PhD
Commissioner