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VDH ADVISES SUMMER CAMPS ON PROTECTING AGAINST H1N1 VIRUS

(RICHMOND, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health recommends that day and residential summer camps in the Commonwealth follow a few simple steps to protect staff and campers from outbreaks of the novel influenza A (H1N1) virus.

“We know how valuable the summer camp experience is for so many of Virginia’s children and families,” said State Health Commissioner Karen Remley, M.D., MBA. “By taking a few precautionary steps, we can help to ensure that these experiences are healthy and enjoyable for everyone involved.”

The most recent data puts the number of confirmed cases of the H1N1 virus at 230 in Virginia, with more than 18,000 cases in the United States reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This week, VDH said that the number of cases in the state is probably higher as most public health laboratory testing now focuses on identifying only the most severe infections. Private lab testing also is available to private physicians.

“It’s likely that this summer, we will continue to see new cases of this virus, both in individuals and in clusters or outbreaks,” Commissioner Remley said. “We are recommending to all camp directors that the best way to reduce the spread of influenza in their camps is through early identification of ill campers and staff, and by having those who are ill stay at home or away from others until they recover.”

Commissioner Remley said camps should:

- Provide education to campers, parents and staff about influenzalike illness, which includes such symptoms as fever, cough and sore throat
- Consider screening all newly arrived attendees for these symptoms.
- For those who become ill, staff should be excluded from work for a minimum of seven days after onset of symptoms, or for 24 hours after symptoms have resolved whichever is longer. Campers should be immediately separated from the general population and kept away from others until they safely can be returned home or taken for medical care, if needed. If at a residential camp, children should be isolated for at least seven days after symptoms begin or 24 hours after they resolve, whichever is longer.
- Discourage visitors who have influenzalike symptoms from visiting the camp.

- Maintain up-to-date contact information from parents or guardians to ensure someone will be available to pick up a child if an illness during the camp session makes this necessary.

Commissioner Remley said camp operators should contact the local health department if they notice an increase in illness among staff or campers. The local health department can facilitate the collection of specimens for laboratory testing and offer guidelines for infection control measures.

Camp operators also are asked to emphasize the importance of preventive measures for reducing the spread of influenza with their staff, camp attendees and visitors.

These measures include:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. All campers and staff should wash their hands before eating any meal or snack and after each use of the toilet.
- Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective if hands are not visibly soiled for those times when soap and water are not readily available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

The CDC has issued interim guidance for day and residential camps for responding to the H1N1 virus at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/camp.htm>.

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