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STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER HIGHLIGHTS MEASURES TO PROTECT AGAINST H1N1 VIRUS

~ Visits students in Danville to discuss preventive measures ~

DANVILLE – State Health Commissioner Karen Remley, M.D., MBA today visited Grove Park Preschool in Danville, to discuss state preparations against the H1N1 virus and to see first hand how schools and local health departments are working together to prepare for the fall flu season. Joining Dr. Remley were Sherman H. Saunders, Mayor of the City of Danville, and Douglas Cox, Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and Student Services at the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE).

Dr. Remley shared the following message from Governor Timothy Kaine, who sent his regrets at not being able to be present: “Now that many of our children are back in school, our focus is very much on safeguarding the health of our students, as well as school faculty and staff. Vaccination is the single most important step Virginians can take to protect themselves from the H1N1 virus. I highly encourage Virginians to take the time to get vaccinated.”

It is expected that the novel H1N1 vaccine will be available in October. All of Virginia’s 119 local health departments will serve as public vaccination sites. In addition, more than 2,700 different entities have pre-registered with VDH, indicating their interest in serving as novel H1N1 vaccination sites. These include hospitals, physicians’ offices across a wide range of medical specialties, pharmacies, home care organizations, long term care facilities, schools and retail stores. VDH is following-up with each of these entities to finalize vaccination arrangements.

Virginia’s novel H1N1 influenza action plan is concentrated on five objectives: monitoring the transmission and behavior of the virus, lessening the impact of the disease that it causes, vaccination to prevent infection, working with the clinical community to ensure appropriate care for those who are infected and providing the public with timely, accurate and understandable information.

“As part of our program, we will be ready and able to vaccinate those Virginians who wish to become immunized,” Dr. Remley said. “Recognizing that school children are particularly susceptible to the virus, there are several effective measures schools can take now to protect their communities against the novel H1N1 flu virus.” They include:

- Advising faculty, staff, parents and students to stay home if they are ill or have flu-like symptoms including fever, cough, sore throat until they have been without a fever for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.

- Encouraging faculty, staff and students to receive a seasonal flu vaccination as early as possible.
- Tracking flu-like illness in students, faculty and staff and reporting sudden increases in such illnesses to the local health department.
- Updating emergency plans to ensure that all contact lists are up to date and that childcare is available if a student needs to stay home.
- Promoting good hand hygiene and respiratory practice, including frequent hand washing, using hand sanitizers when necessary and covering all coughs or sneezes with a tissue or sleeve.

Mayor Saunders said "I am very proud of the strong relationship and close collaboration between the schools and the health department in the City of Danville in order to ensure that our community is protected from the H1N1 virus."

VDOE is working with VDH to establish a statewide absentee reporting system to enhance the health department's ability to track where illness is in the state. VDOE has also issued Pandemic Influenza Plan Guidelines for Virginia Public Schools and developed a dedicated novel H1N1 influenza web site.

"The commonwealth's public schools have been actively preparing for pandemic influenza for several years," Mr. Cox said. "Plans developed in collaboration with local health departments, the business community, and other key groups are in place and VDOE will continue to work in partnership with VDH on measures to protect the health of students and slow the spread of H1N1 influenza."

For more information about novel H1N1 influenza virus, visit www.vdh.virginia.gov, www.doe.virginia.gov, and www.cdc.gov or call toll free 1-877-ASK-VDH3.

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