

REL#09-66
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 29, 2009

CONTACT: Tina Jung
PHONE: 916-319-0818
E-MAIL: tjung@cde.ca.gov

State Schools Chief Jack O'Connell Urges Calm and Precaution Over H1N1 Flu Outbreak

PLEASANT HILL – State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell today urged schools and child care agencies to redouble their efforts to teach flu prevention strategies, and to review and update their school safety plans in light of the current outbreak of **H1N1** flu, also known as the swine flu.

“I commend health and school officials in Contra Costa County for taking the quick precautionary measure of closing down Highlands Elementary School in Pittsburg to ensure the safety of students and staff because of an outbreak of the H1N1 virus there,” said O'Connell.

O'Connell is working closely with state health officials to monitor the rapidly changing situation surrounding the spread of the H1N1 virus and its potential impact on the education of California's 6.2 million public school students. O'Connell stressed the most important thing all Californians can all do to mitigate the spread of flu is to wash hands frequently with soap, cover their coughs and sneezes, and stay home if they are sick.

O'Connell strongly urged all schools, preschools, and child care agencies to have up-to-date safety plans that

include a response to the threat of pandemic flu. The California Department of Education Web site offers guidelines on how to implement a school safety plan. California *Education Code* sections 32282 and 32286 encourage every school in California to have a comprehensive school safety plan that should be reviewed and updated annually. The comprehensive school safety plan should provide guidance for school administration, staff, and students for any emergency that impacts the school, including a public health crisis such as a pandemic. The current H1N1 flu incidents are not yet classified as a pandemic.

The California Department of Education developed in conjunction with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) pandemic flu planning checklists for school districts and preschools to use in the development of this aspect of their school safety plans. For more information on developing school safety plans and checklists for child care agencies, preschools, and local educational agencies, please visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/fluinfo.asp>.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the CDPH are currently advising that local health officers may recommend closure of specific school sites if there are confirmed cases of the H1N1 flu. O'Connell urged local district superintendents and school health officials to stay in close communication with local health officials during the H1N1 flu outbreak.

Schools, parents, and any member of the public may download a free “Keep Our Schools Healthy” tool kit that contains posters on how to prevent the spread of any germs and viruses such as the H1N1 flu at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/148645>.