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

SACRAMENTO/LOS ANGELES – 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 swine flu outbreak.

"I am working closely with state health officials to monitor the spread of swine flu and its potential impact on the education of California's 6.2 million public school students," said O'Connell. "This is a rapidly changing situation that deserves our heightened attention. The most important thing we can all do to mitigate the spread of flu is to wash hands frequently, cover coughs and sneezes, and stay home when we are sick. However, this flu outbreak provides a sobering reminder that all schools, preschools, and child care agencies should have an up-to-date safety plan that includes a response to the threat of pandemic flu. The California Department of Education has excellent resources to help schools with this important planning process."

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 swine flu incidents are not yet classified as a pandemic. The California Department of Education (CDE) 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.

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 students or staff having the swine flu. O'Connell urged local district superintendents and school health officials to stay in close communication with local health officials during the swine flu outbreak.

O'Connell stressed that precaution remains the best course of action to prevent the spread of the swine flu or any illness at school. Students should wash hands often with soap, cover their coughs and sneezes, and avoid contact with students who appear ill. Also, if parents suspect their child is ill, they should keep the child at home and seek medical care. CDE and CDPH developed a free "Keep Our Schools Healthy" information tool kit containing six posters in multiple languages on how to avoid the spread of germs and viruses. The posters may be downloaded from the CDE Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/148645>.

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>.

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