



# Oregon

Theodore R. Kulongoski, Governor

Department of Human Services and The  
Oregon Department of Education

## News Release

September 28, 2009

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### **Oregon schools emphasize prevention, not closures, as they prepare for flu season**

**Salem** – State Schools Superintendent Susan Castillo and Oregon Public Health Director Mel Kohn announced today a new reporting system for school closures related to H1N1 to help schools prepare for flu season, while emphasizing that prevention, not broad closures, will be the primary strategy for addressing outbreaks of the disease.

“Our school districts’ primary goal is to keep our students safe and learning during the flu season,” said State Superintendent of Schools Susan Castillo. “We now know that closing schools for H1N1 will not eliminate the spread of infection and is highly disruptive to the community. Our schools are focusing on preventive measures that will ensure student safety while preserving the learning that is vital to student academic success.”

“The Oregon Public Health Division has been working closely with the schools to ensure that students and their parents know how to prevent the spread of the flu, said Mel Kohn, M.D., state public health director. “One important way to do that is for children from six months to 24 years old to be vaccinated when the vaccine becomes available. We expect vaccine to be available in the next week or two. This age group is one of first groups who should receive the vaccine.”

Oregon school districts have revised their emergency pandemic plans based on Oregon Public Health Division (OPHD) guidance and are encouraged to work with their local health offices during the flu season. Federal Centers for Disease Control recommendations are to not use school closures as a primary strategy for reducing the spread of H1N1 and are urging schools to remain open during the flu season. Instead, Oregon school districts are focusing on preventive measures to slow the spread of the flu. In cases where schools are going to close, schools will submit a short electronic form to The Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The form is available at [www.ode.state.or.us/go/flu](http://www.ode.state.or.us/go/flu).

School districts are already instituting the following preventive measures in their classrooms:

- Stay home if you are sick. Practice the exclusion rule by keeping sick students and staff out of the student population. Parents are urged to keep their children home if they have flu-like symptoms, including fever, cough, sneezing and sore throat.

- Wash your hands. Teach students proper hand hygiene. The Oregon Public Health Division has created a K-12 Flu Fighter curriculum for schools to use and educators are encouraging students and staff to wash their hands throughout the day. It is online at: [www.flu.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/acd/flu/schoolschildcare.shtml](http://www.flu.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/acd/flu/schoolschildcare.shtml).
- Cover your cough. Encourage students to cover their cough or sneeze with something other than their hands such as tissue or their sleeves. Also, schools are encouraged to keep “high touch areas” such as door knobs and desks clean with regular cleaning.
- Best defense: Encouraging staff and students to get the H1N1 as well as the seasonal vaccine when it becomes available.
- Distributing information to students, parents and staff on how to prevent the spread of the flu and to stay healthy. The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) has a CDC communications toolkit available at: [www.ode.state.or.us/go/flu](http://www.ode.state.or.us/go/flu) to aid schools with their communications.
- For more answers about the H1N1 flu, please call the Oregon Public Health Flu Hotline at 1-800-978-3040.
- Stay informed: School districts are meeting regularly with their local health agencies to stay informed about the H1N1 flu virus and vaccination plans.

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