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PRESS RELEASE

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Keeping Your Child Safe from Influenza *As students head back to school, influenza is widespread*

With influenza confirmed by the State Hygienic Lab (SHL) in every region of the state and virus spread continuing, the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) offers tips to parents to help keep their children and classmates healthy. Though the flu season is in full swing, it's not too late to receive a flu vaccination. All three of the flu strains currently circulating are covered by this year's vaccine - A(H3N2), A(H1N1) and B, although some of the A(H3N2) viruses may only be partially covered in the vaccine. Even if you have already had one strain of the flu, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is urging vaccination, because you can still get sick with the other two strains of the flu that are already in Iowa this season.

In addition to vaccination, IDPH recommends the Three Cs for preventing flu illness: Clean your hands frequently; Cover coughs and sneezes; and Confine germs by staying home when ill. "We certainly understand that keeping an ill child home from school or daycare puts a burden on working parents who have to adjust their work schedule to be home as well," said IDPH Medical Director, Dr. Patricia Quinlisk. "But the risk of severe illness is very real. Even if you think your child can 'stick it out' for the school day, it's important to remember that other children in the classroom may be at risk for serious complications from the flu and your child could spread the virus to them. This includes children with weakened immune systems or chronic conditions."

IDPH continues to receive reports of influenza-related hospitalizations and outbreaks. IDPH has confirmed two influenza-related deaths in children (age 0-17). A third pediatric death is under investigation. People at high risk for serious flu complications include: people with underlying chronic medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, or neurological conditions; pregnant women; those younger than 5 years or older than 65 years of age; or anyone with a weakened immune system. A full list of high risk factors is available at www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/high_risk.htm.

Antiviral drugs are a second line of defense to treat flu illness. People at high risk should take antiviral medications for the treatment of influenza illness if they have been prescribed. It's important to contact your health care provider right away if you or your child shows symptoms of the flu, since antivirals work best if given within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms. These symptoms include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Body aches

Illness typically lasts two to seven days. The flu is a respiratory illness caused by viruses. The flu comes on suddenly and may cause severe illness or even death. The "stomach bug," which causes diarrhea and vomiting, is not caused by the influenza virus but usually by norovirus; thus, the flu vaccine will not protect you against this illness.

The flu season typically peaks in February and can last as late as May. To learn more about influenza in Iowa, visit www.idph.state.ia.us/Cade/Influenza.aspx?pg=FluHome. Contact your health care provider or local health department to find out where the vaccine is available in your community or use the Flu Vaccine Finder at www.flu.gov.