

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



Rick Scott
Governor

John H. Armstrong, MD, FACS
State Surgeon General & Secretary

Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

December 5, 2014

Dear Principal or Administrator,

The 2014-15 flu season is off to an earlier than usual start in Florida. Flu activity levels are increasing across the state but are currently highest in children (less than 19 years of age). Increased flu activity in children regularly comes ahead of increased activity in other age groups. The single best way to protect against flu and its potential severe complications is for children to get an influenza vaccine each year. **Please send a letter home to parents encouraging vaccination.** People infected with influenza are infectious to others early in their course of illness. **This means it is important to review school illness exclusion policies with staff, teachers and parents to ensure children sick with flu are rapidly identified and ensure parents keep children home when they are sick.**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently announced that this year's flu vaccine is not as effective against the current strain of the flu virus because the virus has changed. Despite the observed "drift" or changes in the most common flu strain identified this year, vaccination can still decrease severity of illness and can protect against other circulating strains of the virus. **The flu vaccine is safe and continues to be the best way to protect yourself and others from the flu.** The national Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that all individuals six months of age and older receive the flu vaccine each year.

The Department urges schools to help fight the spread of influenza by:

- **Sending a letter to parents encouraging influenza vaccination** (sample letter provided) and **"The Flu: a Guide for Parents"** fact sheet found here:
http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/updated/a_flu_guide_for_parents.pdf
 - Parents and staff can check with their physician, your local health department or visit <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/prevention/flu-prevention/locate-a-flu-shot.html> to search for a flu vaccine location.
- **Ensuring sick students, teachers and staff stay home when they are sick.**
- Coughing or sneezing into a tissue or your elbow, washing your hands frequently, and keeping your hands away from your face.
- Cleaning and disinfect commonly handled surfaces or objects.

For more information on preventing the flu as well as specific materials and tools for schools please visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/>. Please report any influenza outbreaks to your county health department right away or contact them with questions. Thank you for your important contribution to protecting the health of those in the communities you serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anna Marie Likos, MD, MPH".

Anna Marie Likos, MD, MPH
Director, Division of Disease Control & Health Protection
State Epidemiologist

Florida Department of Health

Division of Disease Control & Health Protection • Bureau of Epidemiology
4052 Bald Cypress Way, Bin A-12 • Tallahassee, FL 32399-1720
PHONE: 850/245-4401 • FAX 850/922-9299

www.FloridaHealth.gov

TWITTER: HealthyFLA
FACEBOOK: FLDepartmentofHealth
YOUTUBE: fldoh
FLICKR: HealthyFla
PINTEREST: HealthyFla