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UNLV NURSING PROFESSOR OFFERS TIPS ON HOW CHILDREN CAN AVOID THE H1N1 FLU VIRUS IN SCHOOL

LAS VEGAS – September 1, 2009 – With school back in session for many valley schoolchildren, parents are encouraged to equip their children with simple-to-use tips to keep them healthy and help them avoid getting sick with or spreading the seasonal or H1N1 flu viruses.

The H1N1 flu virus is now a pandemic, with cases reported all over the world. The spread of this novel virus is thought to occur in the same way seasonal flu viruses spread, from ill person to healthy person.

The following tips come from nurse practitioner and UNLV School of Nursing assistant professor Patricia Alpert. Alpert is a fellow of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners and holds national certification as both a pediatric and family nurse practitioner. She currently teaches courses in UNLV's master's and post-master's nurse practitioner programs.

Wash Your Hands Often

One of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of germs is to remind your child to wash his/her hands with soap and warm running water. Hand washing should occur after touching objects that have been handled by other students. Wash especially after sneezing or coughing and after handling used tissues. Wash hands for at least 15 to 20 seconds using a vigorous scrubbing motion so the soap can release the virus from the skin. If soap and water are not readily available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective. Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth because this is an accessible porthole for viruses to enter the body.

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Cover Your Mouth When Sneezing Or Coughing

The H1N1 virus, like many other viruses, spreads when an infected individual coughs or sneezes and releases the virus into the air. Have your child use a tissue to cover his/her mouth to avoid the spread of the virus. If someone is ill, tell your child to stay at least six feet away from the ill individual (the six feet rule) to avoid contact with potential viruses.

Stay At Home If You Are Ill

Stay at home if you or your child are not feeling well to avoid exposing others to the pathogens you may be harboring. Some of the symptoms you might experience if you are infected by the flu virus include a fever or chills, cough, sore throat, headache, runny or stuffy nose and fatigue or body aches. Since children and teenagers seem to be especially vulnerable to becoming infected with this virus, contact your health care provider to see if your child is a candidate for antiviral medication. Not everyone with the flu-like symptoms requires medical treatment since most cases are mild to moderate in severity.

Your child may return to school when he/she has been free of fever for at least 24 hours without medication. The ability to pass along the virus occurs from one day prior to having symptoms to approximately 5 to 7 days after the onset of the flu.

Get vaccinated when the vaccine becomes available

There is currently no vaccine for this novel flu virus, but clinical trials are now being conducted and it is hopeful a vaccine will be available this fall (sometime in October 2009). Additionally, the seasonal flu vaccine will be available this September. It is recommended that parents take advantage of the seasonal flu vaccine and the H1N1 vaccine when they become available.

For more information on both the seasonal flu and the H1N1 virus, please visit <http://flu.gov>.

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