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PRESS RELEASE-For Immediate Release

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South Central Public Health District Will Begin Vaccinating Area Schools Against H1N1

TWIN FALLS—School absentee rates in some southern Idaho schools are double and triple the normal rates for this time of year. Most absences are attributed to H1N1 influenza.

The first shipment of vaccine to protect against H1N1 arrived in south central Idaho last week. On Oct. 16, South Central Public Health District (SCPHD) will begin vaccinating children in area schools. Only children accompanied by a parent or guardian will be vaccinated. Both H1N1 live, attenuated (weakened) flu nasal spray vaccine and H1N1 inactivated vaccine (injections) will be offered. Area school districts will notify parents when it's their school's turn for FREE vaccinations.

“Children are a vaccination priority because H1N1 has hit the under-25 age group in the greatest numbers,” said Rene LeBlanc, SCPHD District Director. “We are also providing vaccine to local health care providers and other health entities to help us reach those other targeted groups, such as pregnant women and health care workers. Once we receive adequate supply and good coverage of the priority groups has been attained, we will make the vaccine more broadly available for everyone that wants the vaccine,” he said.

While most people who stay home and take care of themselves recover from the flu, anyone with health problems that weaken the immune system is at risk of complications if they catch the virus.

Children with symptoms--fever, sore throat, cough, sneezing, headaches, muscle aches, chills and heavy fatigue—should stay home from school until their fever is gone without the aid

of fever-reducing medication. Parents should be aware of warning signs that indicate a child needs medical care immediately:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or interacting
- Excessive irritability
- Flu-like symptoms that improve then return with fever and a worse cough
- Fever with a rash

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports this week that hospitalization rates nationwide for influenza are higher than normal. Hospitalization rates for children ages 5-17 and adults ages 18-49 from April until now exceed the average flu season rates.

Idaho is one of 37 states reporting widespread influenza activity. Idaho has had four deaths related to H1N1 since September 1.

Taking simple precautions every day can help slow the spread of the flu. These precautions include washing hands often and well, staying at least six feet away from anyone who's sick, staying home when you're sick, and coughing and sneezing in your sleeve or a tissue.

More information concerning H1N1, including information for concerned parents, is listed on the SCPHD website, www.phd5.idaho.gov. At this time, SCPHD is NOT offering H1N1 vaccinations to the general public.

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