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Randolph E. Ward, Ed.D.
County Superintendent of Schools
San Diego County Office of Education
6401 Linda Vista Road
San Diego, CA 92111

December 6, 2010

Dear Dr. Ward:

I look forward to our continued partnership in advocating for immunizations in San Diego County schools. Per your request at our meeting on November 29, 2010, I would like to provide several updates on immunization issues to you and to the school districts.

Flu Season. We continue to have sporadic cases of influenza reported in the County. Fortunately, influenza activity has been substantially lower than last year during the H1N1 outbreak. Nevertheless, the best way to help keep the season mild is to encourage everyone to get immunized against influenza. ***It's not too late to get a flu shot, as influenza may not peak in San Diego until March or April.***

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older receive influenza vaccine. The current vaccines contain both seasonal and H1N1 strains and provide effective protection against three common types of influenza. I urge that both staff and students at all schools get immunized to protect themselves and the community against influenza, which can be a very serious illness. Children, seniors and those persons with chronic health problems like asthma and diabetes are especially vulnerable to serious side effects from this disease.

Two doses of flu vaccine. Children age 6 months to 9 years may need two doses of influenza vaccine, depending on their past influenza immunization history. A family's physician or other health care professional will be able to recommend the appropriate number of doses.

Pertussis (whooping cough). Pertussis continues to be a serious health problem in our County, with 960 cases reported as of last week. This disease can be very serious, especially in children less than 12 months of age. Young children have more serious illness and are more likely to suffer complications such as pneumonia or convulsions. The risk of dying from pertussis is greatest for these children. Two local infants have already died this year from pertussis-related complications.

It is easy to unknowingly transmit pertussis to an unimmunized person, especially to an infant who may be too young to have received pertussis vaccine. Older children and adults should receive pertussis vaccine to protect themselves and those around them, including very young infants, from the disease. A dose of Tdap (Tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis) vaccine is recommended for everyone 10 years of age or older who has not yet received it. ***We strongly recommend that teachers and other school staff get the Tdap vaccine to help protect themselves and the students in their care.***

AB 354. A new state law will require that next July 1, 2011, all 7th through 12th grade students receive the Tdap vaccine and have proof of the shot before entering school. Additional materials to help schools implement this new law will be sent to you as they become available.

Thank you for your continuing support in promoting immunizations to help protect the students and communities of San Diego County.

Sincerely,



Wilma J. Wooten, M.D., M.P.H.

Public Health Officer