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www.health.ri.gov

Interim Health Advisory

Date: September 10, 2009

To: Athletic Administrators & Coaches in School & After-School Programs

From: Director of Health, David R. Gifford, MD, MPH

Re: Novel H1N1 Flu Guidance for Athletic Teams & Athletes

Children/students participating in sports may be at higher risk of spreading illness due to common poorly hygienic health practices and close contact with other individuals. The following provides some "common sense" guidance to support efforts that will help decrease the spread of H1N1 and seasonal influenza.

- Remind all athletes of the main disease prevention messages:
 - 1) Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand gel. Students may carry hand gel in school.
 - 2) Cough and sneeze into your elbow, not your hand.
 - 3) Do not share eating or drinking utensils (e.g. cups, straws, water bottles).
 - 4) People who are sick with flu-like symptoms should stay home until they have been fever free (100° F / 37.8° C or lower) for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications. Flu-like symptoms include fever and a sore throat or fever and a cough. Other possible symptoms include: headache; muscle and joint aches; nausea, vomiting or diarrhea; fatigue; pneumonia, and shortness of breath.
- Explain the symptoms of influenza to athletes (fever plus cough or fever plus sore throat)
- Explain to athletes how flu spreads (coughs, sneezes, hand contact, etc.);
- Tell athletes to stay home and out of practice or games if feeling ill or have a fever; And if they show up to practice sick, send them home;
- Eliminate all penalties for missing practice or games due to illness, flu-like symptoms or fever;
- Never share mouthguards;
- Do not shake hands or high-five after games, suggest fist or elbow bumps;
- Do not share towels or other fabric items that have come into contact with hands or face;
- If a student becomes ill during a practice or game, try to separate that student from others, if possible (6 feet away or more);
- Provide strong messages of hygiene, not sharing, etc., for any student athletes with conditions that put them at especially high risk for complications from flu (e.g. diabetes, asthma, immunocompromised, etc.);
- Have alcohol hand gels readily available on the field, in the locker rooms, on the bus, etc.;
- No additional cleaning of sports-related equipment is needed as flu viruses only survive on surfaces for up to 3 hours;
- Remind parents of these disease prevention and control measures so that messages are reinforced at home.

Resources:

- Rhode Island Department of Health H1N1 Influenza Site: <http://www.health.ri.gov/pandemicflu/swineflu/swineflu.php>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: <http://www.hhs.gov/>
- U.S. Department of Education: <http://www.ed.gov>

