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***From the Office of the Medical Health Officer***

October 20, 2009

**To Parents and Staff of SCHOOLS in Sunshine Coast, Powell River, Sea to Sky**

**Update on H1N1 influenza virus (human swine flu) in Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH)**

Several VCH schools have had many students away with flu caused by H1N1 influenza virus. The H1N1 virus is circulating widely in the Lower Mainland.

Almost all children have had illness that, while unpleasant, has not lasted long and has not been severe. If your child, other family members, friends or co-workers fall ill with cough, fever, and muscle aches it may be due to H1N1 flu virus at this time.

A safe and effective vaccine against H1N1 will be available in VCH at the beginning of November. I will send you details of when and where you can get the vaccine. The vaccine is free and there will be enough for everyone.

- If you or your child have a chronic condition like asthma, diabetes, heart or lung disease, or a problem with the immune system, **consult your doctor now to make a flu plan** so you can get a prescription for an anti-viral drug **quickly** if the flu strikes. Anti-viral drugs work best when started **as soon as possible after symptoms start**. Pregnant women also need a flu plan for quick treatment.
- If your child gets flu symptoms, he (or she) should stay at home until symptoms get better and he (or she) is well enough to return to normal activities.
- You can find helpful information about the H1N1 flu virus and how to look after those sick with it at: <http://www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1/backtoschool/>, or call 8-1-1.

Remember, to keep flu from spreading, wash hands often, cough or sneeze into your sleeve (not your hands), and stay home if you are sick. The vaccine will be your best protection against this flu.

Yours truly,



Paul Martiquet, M.D.,C.M.,CCFP.,M.H.Sc.,FRCP(c)  
Medical Health Officer  
Tel: 604-886-5620  
Fax: 604-886-2250  
paul.martiquet@vch.ca  
www.vch.ca