

MARICOPA COUNTY HEALTH DIRECTOR RECOMMENDS
KEEPING SCHOOLS OPEN;
AWAITING NEW CASE COUNT FROM CDC

PHOENIX (May 2, 2009) – While the Maricopa County Department of Public Health is awaiting confirmation of its 58 potential cases of Swine Flu (H1N1) from The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, its director is not waiting.

“Because current data does not suggest that this strain of H1N1 is behaving any differently than seasonal flu, I am recommending schools in Maricopa County no longer dismiss classes due to a confirmed case.” said Dr. Bob England, director of Maricopa Department of Public Health.

“I have weighed this carefully and discussed the options with district school superintendants just this morning and we are all in agreement that we must remain consistent in our public health recommendations,” said England.

“If I dismissed schools every time we had an outbreak of seasonal influenza, I would be closing schools all winter long. Right now, there is no data to support that this H1N1 is any different, so we must defer to our standard, good ‘ol fashioned public health messages that we give every year,” said England. “Wash your hands, stay home when you are sick and cough into your sleeve.”

Schools are strongly advised to continue working with students on proper hygiene as well as reporting absentee rates to the public health department. Also, letters will be sent to the district offices on Monday by the health department outlining the updated recommendation.

England, his staff of epidemiologists and the state health department are monitoring this situation closely and will continue to make recommendations as the situation evolves.

England stressed, “If we learn that this particular strain of H1N1 is changing, I have no problem changing this recommendation and closing schools in Maricopa County if that is what is necessary and that’s where the science points us in order to keep our community safe.”

“We support Maricopa County and its recommendation to its schools,” said Will Humble, acting director of the Arizona Department of Health Services. “One of our biggest roles right now at state health is to continue working closely with our federal partners to make sure our local health officers have the most up-to-date information in order to make these difficult policy decisions for their communities.”