

STATE OF NEW MEXICO
PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
300 DON GASPAR
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO 87501-2786
Telephone (505) 827-5800
www.ped.state.nm.us

DR. VERONICA C. GARCÍA
SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

BILL RICHARDSON
GOVERNOR

STATE OF NEW MEXICO
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
1190 ST. FRANCIS DRIVE
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO 87502-6110
Telephone (505) 827-2613
www.health.state.nm.us

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM
SECRETARY OF HEALTH

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Dear Colleagues:

Scientists predict that the world is due for an influenza pandemic which is a global outbreak of flu from a new strain of influenza. Across New Mexico and the Nation, educators are working with partners in local communities to prepare for a possible emergency.

It is important to remember that every year a large number of people get sick with seasonal flu; 30,000 people in the United States die from seasonal flu annually. Flu vaccines are effective ways to prevent people from becoming ill from the flu.

At this time there is also an avian/bird flu (H5N1) virus circulating in several countries. It is not in the United States now. Presence of the virus in birds does not necessarily mean there will be human cases. There is no conclusive evidence that the disease spreads easily from person to person.

Health experts believe that there will be a new virus that spreads easily among people for which most people have no immunity and for which there is no vaccine. When that happens and people begin to get sick from the virus we will have a pandemic flu.

Across New Mexico and the Nation, educators are working with partners in local communities to prepare for a possible emergency. With assistance from federal, state and local governments, pandemic plans are being prepared and refined to ensure that response is timely and in a way that will help protect students and the public.

The New Mexico Department of Health and the New Mexico Public Education Department have compiled a group of resources for various groups to use as they prepare for a possible pandemic. There are fact sheets as well as web based resources. This document will be on the Public Education Website at <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/sipds/health/index.html>.

The content is in English and Spanish and is divided into four major sections: school district administrators, school teachers, nurses and other staff, parents, students and concerned community members. Topics covered for the four groups will be background information on the risk and potential impact of the pandemic flu, how you can plan and prepare for the pandemic flu, how you can help prevent the spread of the pandemic flu and what you can do if there is a pandemic flu.

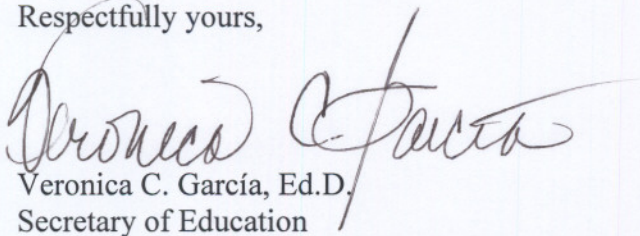
We strongly encourage you to review the documents and work with your local public health office and county emergency managers to develop a plan that meets the needs of your community.

The documents and websites we are providing have been compiled mainly from the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance document, Interim Pre-Pandemic Planning Guidance: Community Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Mitigation in the United States (Community Mitigation Guidance)* which contains planning information on a variety of subjects. This document is available at: <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/community/mitigation.html>. We encourage you to share these links with your staff, parents, students, and colleagues.

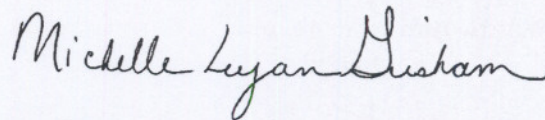
In the coming months, the U.S. Department of Education plans to offer additional guidance to schools, school districts and higher education institutions to explain how Department regulations and policy may apply to the just-released *Community Mitigation Guidance*. Please visit: www.ed.gov/emergencyplan, for additional resources, tools and information on promising practices in crisis planning and emergency response.

The Department of Health and Public Education Department remain committed to supporting you in planning for the possibility of pandemic influenza. Thank you for all you are doing to make this essential activity a top priority.

Respectfully yours,



Veronica C. García, Ed.D.
Secretary of Education



Michelle Lujan Grisham, J.D.
Secretary of Health

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