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New Ruling On Swine Flu Allows Schools To Reopen

SAN BERNARDINO – Following a recommendation from the Centers for Disease Control, schools in San Bernardino County that had been closed as a precautionary measure to slow the spread of the swine flu will be allowed to reopen, the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health announced today.

The six schools – Barton, Cole and Lytle Creek elementaries and Shandin Hills Middle in the San Bernardino Unified School District, Ruth O. Harris Middle in the Colton Joint Unified School District and Clement Middle in the Redlands Unified School District – can return students to classes beginning May 6.

Unless schools have a large number of illnesses of students and/or staff from the swine flu or H1N1 virus, the new federal recommendation is that schools can remain in session while students and staff who are sick stay at home. The lack of virulence of the H1N1 virus factored into the new recommendation, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

“We understand that for those districts who have dismissed students from school, this has been a challenging time for your school community,” County Superintendent Gary Thomas said. “I appreciate the prudence and responsiveness in which our districts and school staff have acted to ensure the health and safety of our students.”

Those who come down with flu-like symptoms are asked to stay home from school for a week, according to the new federal guidelines. Symptoms include fevers over 100 degrees with a
cough or sore throat.

The County Department of Public Health will continue to ask schools to provide daily tallies of absences due to illness until May 16, as it monitors the spread of the H1N1 virus. It also recommends that schools continue to share information concerning prevention tips for their communities. Among the prevention guidelines:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners also are effective.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- For those who get sick, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth as germs spread that way.

If parents have questions, the California Department of Public Health has established a toll free H1N1 hotline: 1-888-865-0564.

To access information to distribute to staff, parents and students, visit the County Schools’ Web section on the swine flu at http://www.sbcss.k12.ca.us. There are links to information and resources available from the California Department of Education, Department of Public Health and the Center of Disease Control.