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H1N1 FLU UPDATE PALM BEACH COUNTY

PALM BEACH COUNTY, FL—Palm Beach County Health Department is continuing its surveillance and monitoring of the H1N1 Swine flu virus throughout the summer. The World Health Organization has now elevated this virus to a level 6 and declared it a pandemic.

The latest information shows there have been 417 confirmed cases in Florida and no reported deaths. Palm Beach County has had 18 confirmed cases and today is adding its first probable cluster as 21 from a camping group of 41 became ill after arriving at their North Carolina destination. Nine of the sick returned to Palm Beach County Wednesday, and six more from the group are being treated in North Carolina and are expected to return with the remaining campers this weekend. The North Carolina Department of Health confirmed two of the six as H1N1 and with additional test results pending locally it is presumed all 21 became ill from the virus.

WHO's decision to raise the pandemic alert level to Phase 6 is a reflection of the spread of the virus, not the severity of illness caused by the virus. It's uncertain at this time how serious or severe this novel H1N1 pandemic will be in terms of how many people infected will develop serious complications or die from novel H1N1 infection. Experience with this virus so far is limited and influenza is unpredictable. However, because novel H1N1 is a new virus, many people may have little or no immunity against it, and illness may be more severe and widespread as a result. In addition, currently there is no vaccine to protect against novel H1N1 virus.

Health Department Director, Dr. Jean Malecki said, "We will continue to monitor the number of H1N1 and other flu cases in our county throughout the summer months."

Dr. Malecki recommends the following:

People with respiratory illness should stay home from work or school to avoid spreading infections, including influenza, to others in the community.

- **Avoid close contact with people who are coughing or otherwise appear ill.**
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.**
- **Wash hands frequently to lessen the spread of respiratory illness.**

If you think you have influenza, please call your health care provider or the health department at 840-4500 and discuss whether you need to be seen in their office, emergency department or stay home. Three websites are also updated regularly www.pbchd.com , www.cdc.gov, www.doh.state.fl.us locally information can be obtained by calling 211.

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