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The right system for bright futures

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Preparing for the Swine Flu

Every year the flu affects thousands of people. With the onset of the H1N1 virus, more commonly known as the swine flu, more people will become sick with the flu during the fall and winter months. Young children are particularly at risk for contracting the swine flu and so steps must be taken to protect their health during the coming months.

Get vaccinated: Children younger than 5 years old are at great risk of developing complications from the flu and that risk is even greater for children younger than 2. Even more vulnerable are children younger than 6 months of age since they are too young to receive the flu vaccine. As a result, it is very important for parents and caregivers of these young children to get vaccinated. Vaccination is the primary means of preventing the flu. If a parent or caregiver of a young child is vaccinated, they are less likely to become sick with the flu and thereby not pass on illness to their young children. By getting vaccinated, you are not only protecting yourself but you are protecting the children in your home.

Update your contact information: If someone other than yourself cares for your child while you are at work, it is important to update your contact information with your child babysitter. If your child becomes sick it will be important for them to go home so that they don't infect the other children. This means the babysitter must have current contact information for you so that they can contact you if your child starts to show signs of the flu.

Stay home when sick: Almost all employers offer sick leave to their employees so it's a good idea to use that leave when you are sick. Additionally, when your child is sick, they need a loving parent at home to care for them rather than being sent to the daycare or babysitter feeling lousy. The Center for Disease Control recommends staying home for 24 hours *after* your fever is gone. In most cases, this means you will be home from work 3-5 days to care for yourself or

for a child that is sick. You will want to make sure to talk to your supervisor and communicate clearly with them your need to stay home.

Practice good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette: The flu virus is spread through small droplets from one infected person to another person. In order to prevent the spread of the flu, it's important to practice good hygiene. This includes—washing hands frequently; keep your hands away from your nose, mouth and eyes; cover noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or a shirt sleeve or elbow if no tissue is available); don't share utensils or cups with others.

Perform routine house cleaning: Toys and play areas of children should be cleaned more frequently than normal since these items tend to come into contact with hands and mouths of multiple children. One idea for cleaning toys regularly is to have disinfectant wipes available that you can wipe down toys with. In addition, homes should be cleaned routinely in order to help reduce the spread of germs that can be lingering in your home.

These suggestions can't guarantee that you or your children won't get sick but they will greatly reduce the likelihood you or loved ones won't get the flu.

If you would like more information about early childhood development and health, please feel free to contact Rochelle Lacapa, Regional Coordinator at (928) 532-5041 or via email at rlacapa@azftf.gov.