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TEA encourages schools to reopen based on CDC flu guidance

AUSTIN – In light of revised school closure guidelines from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Texas Education Agency today is advising districts to reopen schools.

The decision to close a school because of confirmed or probable H1N1 influenza cases remains a local decision. However, based on the new CDC guidance, both TEA and the Department of Health Services are recommending that schools reopen.

“We strongly encourage school officials to reopen schools based on the new advice from CDC,” said Commissioner of Education Robert Scott. “In the early phase of this outbreak, it was appropriate for schools and health officials to act cautiously. Within the last 24 hours, the new information made it clear that we can follow standard procedures for dealing with the flu.”

The new CDC guidance says, “New information on disease severity warrants revision of the school closure guidance. Most U.S. cases have not been severe and are comparable in severity to seasonal influenza. CDC and local and state health officials will continue to closely monitor the severity and spread of this novel H1N1 influenza outbreak.”

As of today, CDC says the primary means to reduce the spread of influenza in schools will focus on early identification of ill students and staff, staying home when ill, and good cough and hand hygiene etiquette. CDC officials said, “Decisions about school closure should be at the discretion of local authorities based on local considerations, including public concern and the impact of school absenteeism and staffing shortages.”

Scott said, “We want to get students back into school as quickly as possible, but if you or your child is sick, stay home. It may take some time for school leaders to consult with local health officials and to prepare schools for reopening.”

Schools that reopen this week should plan to begin Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills testing on Monday. Last week was the primary week of TAKS testing for the state's public schools and many schools were shut during one or more testing days.

As of today, 491,499 students have missed school because of the closure of 831 schools due to the H1N1 flu outbreak.

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