

COMPREHENSIVE WORKPLACE PROGRAMS NEEDED TO CONTROL THE SPREAD OF THE H1N1 FLU EPIDEMIC

Whereas, on June 11, 2009 the World Health Organization declared that the outbreak of novel H1N1 flu had reached worldwide epidemic proportions; and

Whereas, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that between April 1 and November 14, 2009 about 47 million Americans had become infected with this strain of flu, of whom 213,000 had to be hospitalized and about 9,800 died (Source: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/estimates_2009_h1n1.htm); and

Whereas, a large number of those who have died from this flu strain have been children and young adults of school age (5-17 years of age), an unusual target group for strains of flu, which usually affect primarily the sick and elderly; and

Whereas, by their public, congregate nature schools put their teachers, staff and students at elevated risks of H1N1 exposure; and

Whereas, as of the end of 2009 novel H1N1 is still at epidemic proportions, according to the CDC; and

Whereas, although the outbreak in New York State has fortunately been less severe than originally anticipated, epidemiologists and other medical experts continue to fear a renewed outbreak of this illness, and it is essential that New York be prepared for any future infectious disease emergencies; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that NYSUT call on the State Department of Education to develop comprehensive public health programs in all New York State schools from K through Higher Education and all other appropriate NYSUT-represented workplaces in New York State, including the following components:

- Voluntary vaccination programs as appropriate for teachers, staff and students against novel H1N1 and ordinary seasonal influenza outbreaks,
- Proper hygiene protection at all workplaces including adequate maintenance and cleaning of bathroom and kitchen facilities,
- Provision and maintenance of hand-washing stations in all bathroom and kitchen facilities, and of hand-washing or sanitizing stations at the entrances to all buildings and large classrooms,
- Risk and exposure assessment for all employees based on actual job tasks, not on job titles,

- Provision of appropriate respirators (such as N95 respirators) for those with high or very high exposure risk, usually health-care and related workers, who come into frequent, close contact with persons known or suspected to have H1N1 flu, and
- Extensive public health education and emergency training for employees and students in the event of a major epidemic outbreak, as well as preventive personal practices which can help limit the spread and impact of flu outbreaks;
- Development of an infectious disease response plan that ensures preparedness for possible future infectious disease emergencies; and be it further

RESOLVED, that NYSUT urge OSHA and New York State PESH to consider adoption of an infectious disease standard to deal with future flu outbreaks and applaud both agencies for adopting a comprehensive approach to protecting worker health and safety during the current H1N1 outbreak and for using their powers under the General Duty Clause of OSHA to enforce their H1N1 exposure guidelines; and be it further

RESOLVED, that NYSUT encourage its members, both those who fit the higher exposure H1N1 guidelines and those who are in other public health risk groups, to be vaccinated against H1N1, and encourage those who are in risk groups for seasonal flu to get their appropriate vaccinations; and be it further

RESOLVED, that NYSUT continue to be an advocate for employee choice and firmly oppose mandatory flu vaccination programs in schools and other workplaces. Such mandatory programs, with their threats of work sanctions and firings, promote worker hostility and turn discussion away from the virtues of such vaccinations into a dispute over worker rights and management prerogatives. While Governor Paterson withdrew in 2009 his Health Department's requirement for mandatory H1N1 vaccinations of all health workers in New York State—a decision NYSUT applauded—State Health Commissioner Richard Daines has since warned that he may seek to re-instate this requirement in the future; and be it further

RESOLVED, that NYSUT call on Boards of Education, university administrations and other employer groups to adjust existing policies on absences and sick leave so that such policies will cease to be a *disincentive* for faculty, staff and students who may be afflicted by the disease to take the single most important measure for public health: self-isolation. Such policy changes must provide for paid sick days on a pro-rata basis for adjunct, temporary, part-time and contingent employees, since many such employees lack even a single day of paid sick leave, and must allow for the accumulation of sick leave.