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Commissioner of Health Statement Concerning Milwaukee's H1N1 Response

A statement issued today by Milwaukee County Supervisor Elizabeth Coggs on H1N1 disease activity in the Milwaukee community has several inaccuracies that I wish to correct.

First, however, I wish to emphasize that the City of Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) is saddened by the death of Milwaukee residents who were infected with the novel H1N1 virus. At every step along the way I have taken every prudent effort to protect the health of all people of Milwaukee.

Our department continues to refine its pandemic response plan, and we are currently preparing for mass vaccination efforts in the fall if public health surveillance indicates that severity of illness is becoming worse over time. We also continue to work closely with healthcare professionals throughout the city to ensure consistency with the latest recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Wisconsin Department of Public Health, and, of course, our own local MHD recommendations.

Throughout this investigation we have stressed that pandemic H1N1 is a new virus, to which nobody has any immunity, and for which there is currently no vaccine. Milwaukee, while leading the nation with more than 3200 cases reported, has reported only four deaths. This death rate is significantly lower than many large cities, including New York City. Furthermore, MHD has been extremely aggressive in "sounding the alarm" and in encouraging action by the public.

In fact, MHD has been criticized by some for bringing too much attention to this outbreak, for closing schools too aggressively, etc. Yet despite this criticism we have consistently urged the community to follow our recommendations in order to slow the spread of this disease in Milwaukee. These recommendations include staying at home (and calling your doctor) if you're exhibiting any signs of respiratory illness such as fever, cough, or sore throat, seeing your doctor if your symptoms are worsening, and continuing good hygiene practices even if you are feeling well, such as frequent hand-washing and covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.

For more information visit the City of Milwaukee Health Department website at www.milwaukee.gov/health