



For Immediate Release
July 6, 2009

Contact: Caitlin Kelleher
505-476-2299

Governor Bill Richardson Announces State Cabinet Officials to Take Part in National H1N1 Summit

SANTA FE – Governor Bill Richardson today announced that three New Mexico officials, including Cabinet Secretaries, will participate in a national forum on influenza preparedness later this week.

Secretary of Education Veronica Garcia, Homeland Security and Emergency Management **Secretary** John Wheeler, and Mary Schumacher, Bureau Chief for Health Emergency Management of the Department of Health will represent New Mexico at the national H1N1 Influenza Preparedness Summit on Thursday, July 9th in Bethesda, Maryland.

“New Mexico was well equipped for the H1N1 outbreak this past spring but we must continue to look forward and be prepared for the upcoming flu season,” said Governor Bill Richardson. “As we continue to work closely with national partners, I am pleased that we are taking part in this forum and strengthening our ongoing efforts to prevent the spread of H1N1.”

Local, state and federal officials from across the country will come together on Thursday to discuss planning efforts for the upcoming flu season. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano and Education Secretary Arne Duncan are hosting the multi-agency event.

“Coordinating communication plans for schools and school districts in the event of a flu outbreak is critical,” said Education Secretary Veronica García. “I look forward to sharing these plans with other state education officials on this complex issue.”

“We appreciate the opportunity to get together with our partners across the country who are facing the same challenges in planning for mass vaccination clinics for H1N1 flu this fall as well as updating their preparedness plans to be ready for a potential pandemic in their state,” said Health Secretary Alfredo Vigil.

“We need to be prepared for any and all situations for the fall flu season, and the more information we have, the better,” said Homeland Security Secretary John Wheeler. “H1N1 is a new and possibly severe strain of the disease and the outcome cannot be predicted. The more prepared we are; the better the outcome.”

Topics to be covered at the summit include: Funding Support for State, Tribal and Territorial Partners, Flu Season School Preparedness, Vaccination Planning and Communications. The United States Department of Health and Human Services is providing a stipend for the state officials to attend this summit.

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Caitlin Kelleher
Media Coordinator for Governor Richardson
Office of the Governor
State Capitol, Suite 400
Santa Fe, NM
office 505.476.2299 | cell 505.795.2480