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Dear Parent:

The United States, including California and Nevada County, is currently experiencing a large number of cases of Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) infections. This letter is to make you aware of the RSV surge so that you can take steps to protect your child and the school community from RSV.

RSV is a common respiratory virus that usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms. Most people recover in 1-2 weeks without treatment. However, RSV can be serious, especially in infants and older adults, causing pneumonia (lung infection) and bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lung) in children under 1 year of age. Those at greatest risk of severe illness with RSV include premature infants, infants 6 months and younger, children under two years old with lung or heart disease, children with weakened immune systems, and children who have difficulty swallowing or clearing secretions. There is no vaccine available to protect against RSV and there is no medication available to prevent RSV infection after exposure.

RSV spreads by coming into contact with respiratory droplets containing the virus. This can occur when an infected person coughs or sneezes and droplets contact eyes, nose, or mouth, or when one touches a surface with the virus on it, like a doorknob, and then touches one's face without washing hands. Early symptoms of RSV include a runny nose, decrease in appetite, and cough, which may progress to difficulty breathing. Other symptoms are fever, sneezing, and wheezing.

Fall and winter are a time of year when respiratory viruses spread widely as people spend more time indoors together in drier air. During respiratory virus season, there are steps you can take to protect your child from RSV, COVID-19, and influenza disease. Please consider doing the following:

1. Have your child wash their hands often.
2. Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that people frequently touch.
3. Have your child avoid contact with sick people.
4. If your child is at least 2 years old, have them wear a mask indoors outside the home, including at school.
5. When indoors in public spaces, everyone in your family should wear a mask.

6. Vaccinate your child against influenza. Everyone 6 months and older should get a flu shot every year.
7. Vaccinate your child against COVID-19. It is recommended that everyone 6 months and older receive the COVID vaccine. If your child has already received the primary vaccine series, then they are eligible to receive a bivalent (aka Omicron) booster if their last shot was at least 2 months ago.
8. If your child is at high risk for severe RSV disease, talk to your healthcare provider about monthly treatment with palivizumab, a monoclonal antibody that can provide protection against severe disease.

If your child has cold-like symptoms, do NOT send them to school or to daycare. They should stay home until their symptoms are improving and any fever is gone. Make sure that your child drinks enough fluids to prevent dehydration. If your child is having difficulty breathing, seek medical care right away. The symptoms of RSV infection may be very similar to symptoms of other respiratory infections, including COVID-19 and influenza, and only a test can definitively tell these infections apart. As a reminder, symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, chills, sore throat, nasal congestion or runny nose, headache, muscle or body aches, loss of taste and/or smell, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. I encourage you to test your child for COVID-19 when they have any symptoms, but keep in mind that the test is only able to detect COVID-19. A person with a negative COVID test could still have influenza, RSV, or another viral infection. If your child's COVID test is negative but they have symptoms, keep them home from school until their symptoms are improving.

In addition to these steps that you can take to protect your child from respiratory illness this fall and winter, Public Health is asking schools and day care providers to clean and disinfect surfaces frequently and to send home children and staff who are sick.

Thank you for protecting your child and school community from respiratory viruses.

Sincerely,

Glennah Trochet, MD,
Nevada County Deputy Health Officer

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