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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**Top Health and Education Officials Partner to Prevent the Spread of the Flu**

**CHARLESTON, W.Va.** – West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Cabinet Secretary Karen L. Bowling and State Superintendent of Schools Michael Martirano today announced a partnership in education efforts to fight the flu in West Virginia’s schools.

The joint press event was held at Mary C. Snow West Side Elementary School in Charleston, West Virginia.

“With students returning to schools from a long holiday break, it’s important for West Virginia’s health and education leaders to join forces to help stop the spread of the flu,” Bowling said. “In the coming weeks, flu cases are likely to increase among school-aged children.”

Last week, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention declared a flu epidemic, with West Virginia among the states with widespread activity. The predominant strain circulating, influenza A H3N2, is associated with more severe illness and mortality, especially in young children and older people.

“We know that one of the hardest hit populations has been school-aged children,” Martirano said. “It’s important for us to double our efforts to ensure students and staff are taking the preventive measures necessary to ensure their safety and well-being.”

Bowling has tasked Bureau for Public Health Commissioner and State Health Officer Dr. Rahul Gupta to collaborate with the State Department of Education to prevent further spread of the flu.

Gupta said there are several preventive steps you can take to fight the flu:

- Get a flu shot. It’s not too late. While the flu vaccine this year does not match the dominant strain (H3N2) circulating, it can still protect you against other circulating strains and reduce the chances of developing flu related complications.
- Wash your hands frequently, cover your cough and sneeze into your sleeve if you do not have a tissue.
- Wipe down frequently touched surfaces with a disinfectant.
- **STAY HOME** when you are sick.

Flu symptoms include quick onset of fever, body aches, extreme tiredness and dry cough. Persons who may be suffering from influenza-like symptoms should see a medical provider right away.

For more information about the flu, go to [www.dide.wv.gov](http://www.dide.wv.gov) and click on “Influenza.”

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