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Dear Parent/Guardian,

We are delighted to let you know about a collaborative effort between the New River Health District (NRHD) and Montgomery County Public Schools to provide vaccinations in the schools.

Flu season is almost here and we want to help keep your children and the adults who care for them healthy. The flu is a highly contagious viral illness. It can spread rapidly in crowded, close quarters such as classrooms; one can be contagious and spreading disease a full 24 hours before even feeling sick. Flu can lead to serious health issues like pneumonia and can cause students to miss several days of class which can negatively impact learning. Each year many children are hospitalized from complications related to the flu. That is why it is so important for us to work together to protect our children and ourselves! Here are some ways to reduce the spread of illness:

➤ **Get Vaccinated Every Year**

A flu vaccine is the best way to protect against the flu. Everyone 6 months and older with no contraindications should get a flu vaccine each year.

➤ **Use Good Hand Hygiene**

Children need to be reminded to wash their hands often. This is especially true for younger children who are likely to wipe their noses or rub their eyes and then handle objects or touch other children.

➤ **Practice Good Cough Etiquette**

It's also important to cover the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. If tissue isn't available, it's best to cough or sneeze into the elbow or shoulder, not into hands. It's also important to avoid touching the eyes, nose or mouth, as germs are spread this way.

The students of Montgomery County Public Schools will have the opportunity to receive the influenza vaccine in the month of October this year. The NRHD hopes that this will be a convenient option for families. The dates of the health department's visit to each school are not yet finalized, but you will get notice of the date for your child(ren)'s school. In order for the NRHD to provide a vaccination to your child we must have your consent. Please **complete, sign, and return** the attached Student Influenza Vaccination Consent form to your child's school by **September 18, 2017**. In addition, you will want to read and keep the *Influenza Vaccine Information Statement*. If a completed and signed consent form is not returned to the school, your child will not be given the vaccination at school.

There will be no charge to parents of children who choose to receive the flu vaccine; however, state law requires that local health departments collect your insurance information and bill for costs associated with the administration of the vaccine. Any cost not covered by your insurance will not be billed to you.

Please remember that this vaccination opportunity is entirely voluntary and it does not eliminate the need for your child to receive regular check-ups with a primary care physician.

Sincerely,

Noelle Bissell, M.D.
New River Health District Health Director
Virginia Department of Health