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Department of Public Health Provides Rally Cry for San Franciscans: "Infect Me Not!"

Ads, Videos and Songs Teach New Ideas on Staying Healthy

San Francisco, CA — Health officials from the San Francisco Department of Public Health, led by Dr. Mitch Katz, Director of Health and Dr. Susan Fernyak, Director of Communicable Disease Control & Prevention will kick off *Infect Me Not*, a public health campaign and press conference on **Wednesday, October 8, 10 a.m.** on the **steps of City Hall** to announce the launch of a city-wide education and outreach program designed to keep San Franciscans well by introducing healthy habits that prevent the spread of common infectious diseases.

The *Infect Me Not* campaign was developed to reduce cases of avoidable infectious diseases and in response to public concerns. Participants from focus groups, held by the health department, said they felt "threatened" by germs spread by co-workers, friends, and people on elevators and other public spaces. They wished people made a greater effort to "keep their germs to themselves."

According to public health officials, most people know some healthy habits, but they don't always follow them or see others using them. The public wanted information about infectious diseases and how germs spread. In a plus for prevention advocates, people wanted specific steps to prevent getting sick. These findings helped the *Infect Me Not* team develop campaign messages that focus on two themes: infectious diseases/germs and healthy habits.

To underscore the campaign's objectives, various materials and messages were produced for the public including brochures, PSAs on public transportation, video, and radio, and, in a boost to the local songwriting community, a contest that produced original healthy habit songs. Materials will be shared at street fairs, community meetings, trainings, and other venues throughout the city. Detailed information and materials are also available on the web at www.InfectMeNot.org. Bus and BART *Infect Me Not* ads run beginning in October and PSAs will be distributed across San Francisco throughout fall 2008.

Although the campaign launches at the beginning of flu season, health officials hope people will heed the messages and practice healthy habits throughout the year. "We predict that over half of San Franciscans will get sick this year from at least one infectious disease," said Dr. Katz.

The campaign highlights eight healthy habits—some are reminders of childhood lessons while others are new and may be surprising. (See attached list). For example, people should cough and sneeze into their sleeve or a tissue. Coughing and sneezing into hands is wrong. Hands covered with germs spread disease easily when they are used to open doors, shake hands, and touch commonly used items.

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Health officials are calling upon the City's community leaders—from soccer coaches to workplace supervisors to grandparents—to teach and practice the healthy habits and messages. For example, teachers can incorporate healthy habits and messages into their curriculum and managers can encourage staff to use healthy habits by staying home when sick.

“There isn't just one healthy habit that keeps us safe from disease,” observed Dr. Fernyak, whose office has already seen the advent of an early flu season for 2008. “Staying healthy means overlapping healthy habits. When practiced together, we can all stay healthy. We have a responsibility to ourselves and our community to stop disease, not just during flu season – but every day.”

The Department of Public Health is collaborating with other local government agencies, the San Francisco Health Plan, Neighborhood Emergency Response Teams (NERT), Gap, and other non-profit and corporate partners, in an effort to reach all San Franciscans with the *Infect Me Not* message.

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