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PRESS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Flu outbreak at prison in Blythe poses no significant health risk to community

An influenza outbreak that apparently began about two weeks ago has been identified at the Chuckawalla Valley State Prison in Blythe. Since Feb. 23, approximately 546 inmates have exhibited flu-like symptoms. Ten inmates have been hospitalized and there have been two deaths. The deaths are being reviewed to determine whether influenza was a factor.

The outbreak does not pose any significant health threat in the Palo Verde Valley. In the midst of influenza season, reports of flu-like illnesses had increased in the Blythe area but those reports peaked in mid February and have since declined. The Riverside County Department of Public Health is working closely with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and local hospitals to address the outbreak. Appropriate measures have been taken to reduce the spread of influenza.

"We have been at the prison and have taken the proper steps to deal with the outbreak," said Dr. Eric Frykman, Riverside County's public health officer. "I want to reassure the community that the outbreak does not pose any unusual health risks."

Residents are encouraged to wash hands often, avoid close contact with people who are sick and to stay home from work or school when ill. Sick individuals should take precautions when going to their doctor or clinic to reduce the risk to others.

Unvaccinated individuals seeking influenza vaccinations should contact their medical providers or call the Riverside County Public Health Central Scheduling number (800) 720-9553 to confirm vaccine availability.

Members of the media who have further questions about the public-health aspects of the influenza outbreak should contact Dr. Eric Frykman at 951-358-5058. For information about the prison and its internal operations, contact Lt. Debbie Asuncion at (760) 922-9710 or Terry Thornton at (916) 445-4950.