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## DepEd chief enlists support of local officials on H1N1 prevention

DepEd Secretary Jesli Lapus finds allies in local officials in preventing the spread of AH1N1 virus in the communities.

“In the midst of the spread of the AH1N1 virus, DepEd can have allies from our local government units through the Essential Health Care Program,” he said as he addressed the Vice Mayors League in Region 3 held in Clarkfield, Pampanga recently.

EHCP is a school-based health program of DepEd, which advocates simple and cost-effective health interventions that will promote cleanliness and prevent sickness among school children.

Lapus told local officials that in EHCP, pupils are taught health care, including oral hygiene that will keep sickness at bay. The program also develops in them the habit of proper hand washing in order to prevent the spread of swine flu virus.

“Under the EHCP, each child gets one toothbrush and given access to toothpaste, soap and deworming tablets,” he explained.

Recent studies by DepEd, the Department of Health and the University of the Philippines revealed that diarrhea and respiratory tract infections are leading causes of death among school children; 67% of children are infected with intestinal worms; 97% have tooth decay, with toothache as the main reason for absenteeism in school; and low school performance compared to neighboring countries.

Local government units are strong partners of DepEd in increasing the participation and retention rate and in reducing incidence of drop-out among public school students.

Lapus also encouraged the local government executives to maximize their Special Education Fund to build more classrooms. “For DepEd’s part, we will match every classroom you build with a teacher,” he said.

Meanwhile, Lapus enlisted the support of the vice mayors in getting more children to enroll in school. “Remember that school-aged children should be in school and not on the streets.

“There are many creative ways of reaching out to our learners who are outside the formal schooling system,” he added.

**END**