Statement by the Acting Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights
Addressing Civil Rights in the Response to H1N1 Influenza

As we respond to H1N1 influenza, it is important to remain vigilant in ensuring civil rights compliance. Access to accurate emergency and health information is critical to providing all people with the ability to make informed decisions and protect themselves, their families, and the community at large. In addition, science and the law must lead our efforts to ensure that unfounded fear and/or prejudice do not limit access to housing, education, benefits, services, employment, and information on account of race, color, national origin, disability, or other protected status.

The Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, together with other agencies throughout the federal government, have been monitoring civil rights issues related to H1N1 influenza. We will also continue to work within our federal agencies to ensure that civil rights issues are integrated into emergency planning and response.

1. ***Provide information in languages other than English.*** Public education is crucial for a successful response to any threat. Large numbers of people do not read or understand English well. Yet all people need to understand healthy behaviors, symptoms, and when to stay home. Messages directed at the entire country should be provided in the wide array of languages spoken by limited English proficient people in the United States. In addition, information at the state and local level should be provided in the languages most commonly spoken in those communities. More information about ensuring language access can be found at www.lep.gov. Multi-lingual brochures on language access rights can be found at http://lep.gov/dojbrochures.html.

2. ***Ensure that there is no harassment or other discrimination directed at people who are immigrants or of Mexican descent.*** As in all emergencies, the H1N1 influenza outbreak has affected people of many different races and ethnicities. Harassment or other forms of discrimination is not only illegal, but may discourage people from coming forward to seek treatment or information. Laws prohibiting such behavior must be and will be vigorously enforced. For multi-lingual information on national origin discrimination, please see http://lep.gov/dojbrochures.html.

3. ***Provide access to information and health services to people with disabilities.*** Many traditional notification methods are not accessible or usable for people with disabilities. For instance, people who are deaf or hard of hearing cannot hear radio, sirens, or other aural alerts. Individuals with cognitive disabilities may not understand complex language. Health care and other involved entities must make every effort to reach out to every segment of the disability community in formats that are accessible to them. For more information on access for individuals with disabilities, please see www.ada.gov.

For information concerning disability-related questions, please contact the Disability Rights Section, at (202) 307-0663, (202) 514-0301 (TDD). Information may also be found at www.ada.gov. For all other civil rights questions, please contact the Coordination and Review Section (COR), at (202) 307-2222, (202) 307-2678 (TDD). COR's website may be found at www.usdoj.gov/crt/cor. COR is a clearinghouse for civil rights complaints and also is the lead office for ensuring compliance with language access requirements across the federal government.