FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2009 National Health Education Week Focuses on Food Safety: 
Health Educators Offer Tips and Resources for Consumers and Professionals

Washington D.C. – Recognizing that everyone from farm to fork has a role to play in food safety, the Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE) will celebrate this year’s National Health Education Week, October 19-23, with the theme “Let’s Dish: Food Safety at the Table.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 76 million foodborne illnesses occur annually, resulting in more than 300,000 hospitalizations and some 5,000 deaths. 1 Especially at risk are children, the elderly, pregnant women and those with compromised immune systems.

“Foodborne illness is preventable, and consumers can play a key role in handling and keeping their food safe— whether it’s through handling food properly, responding quickly to food recalls, or practicing safe home canning procedures,” stresses Suzanne Driessen, a health education specialist at the University of Minnesota’s Extension Service who works with thousands of families and communities each year.

To assist consumers and event organizers, SOPHE is making available a comprehensive National Health Education Week Tool Kit containing handouts, fact sheets, and other easily-reproducible materials on safe food handling practices—whether preparing food at home, packing a lunch, or tailgating. Ideas for organizing school, community and worksite events that emphasize food safety are also included, such as poster contests and kid-friendly experiments. The colorful kit also includes links to government and other valuable Web sites, as well as the latest tips for communicating through social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, blogs, etc). Free copies of the tool kit are available for downloading at the SOPHE Web site, www.sophe.org.

Another highlight of the week-long celebration will be a free webinar on preventing food borne illness on Tuesday, October 20 from 2-3:30 ET. This computer-assisted educational event will feature three national authorities on minimizing your food safety risks, efforts of government and food producers to keep food safe and special precautions for high-risk populations. Registration is open to the public and is available on SOPHE’s Online Calendar of Events, at www.sophe.org.

“Health educators play a vital role in promoting the health of the public, whether it’s through food safety education or prevention of the spread of H1N1 flu this Fall,” emphasizes M. Elaine Auld, MPH, CHES (certified health education specialist), Chief Executive Officer, SOPHE. “National Health Education Week offers a prime opportunity to celebrate the commitment of professionally trained health educators to serving the public where they live, work, and play each day.”

SOPHE sponsors National Health Education Week annually during the third week of October in order to focus national attention and raise awareness of pressing health issues of interest to the public. Since 1995, SOPHE has provided support to schools, communities, and health education professionals throughout the nation to plan and conduct activities around the designated theme.

SOPHE is a non-profit professional organization founded in 1950 to provide leadership to the profession of health education and to contribute to the health of all people through advances in health education theory and research, excellence in health education practice, and the promotion of public policies conducive to health. Located in Washington, DC, SOPHE has more than 4,000 members and 20 chapters located throughout the U.S., Western Canada and Northern Mexico. For more information, go to www.sophe.org.

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SOPHE Authorities Available for Interviews. The following spokespeople are available for interviews concerning National Health Education Week, food safety measures, and health educator issues.

**M. Elaine Auld, M.P.H., CHES. CEO, Society for Public Health Education.** Ms. Auld directs the nation’s only independent organization devoted to public health education and health promotion. Ms. Auld oversees the Society’s portfolio of programs in professional development, research and advocacy on behalf of health education. She is also a member of APHA’s Joint Policy Committee and Action Board and serves on APHA’s Health Disparities Work Group. Prior to joining SOPHE, Ms. Auld worked in food safety/nutrition communications and in patient education for some 15 years. Ms. Auld has broad knowledge of the health education profession and the role of health educators as key public health personnel.

**Suzanne Driessen, Extension Educator, Food Science, University of Minnesota Extension**

Suzanne Driessen is an Extension Educator specializing in food safety education. She develops and teaches food safety and food science classes to the food service industry and consumers. She is noted for developing creative and interactive educational tools including the award winning Food Safety Wheel, Serve It Up Safely online food safety training course and Food Safety Game Interactive Display. She teaches food preservation classes and has been featured in two webinars on the subject. Her educational background includes a Bachelor of Science degree in Health Education and a Masters of Arts in Adult Education. She is a Certified Health Education Specialist and a Licensed Practical Nurse.

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