

November 3, 2009

Dear Parents,

The H1N1 flu outbreak is affecting our district to a lesser extent than some surrounding districts, but we fully expect that our absentee rate will rise. It remains important for you to take the kinds of precautions that protect you and your children from becoming ill. It is also important to develop a care plan for children who cannot attend school. Some of you might be keeping your children home from school as a defense against the illness. Please be mindful that state health officials expect the H1N1 flu season to extend through January. Therefore, we'll be addressing concerns with this illness for quite some time yet.

In our schools, we will continue to emphasize good healthy practices, and we encourage you to do the same at home. Automatic sanitizing liquid dispensers have been placed in all elementary schools to encourage regular hand washing. Not intended to replace soap and water, the dispensers are placed strategically for those occasions when a lavatory is not readily available. You can emphasize the same practice at home. Further, our custodial crews are taking added steps to wipe high risk surfaces regularly. There have been news stories of schools or districts that are shut down for days at a time due to widespread outbreak. It is not a strategy recommended by state officials, and though we are prepared for that possibility, we have no intention of closing schools if absences increase.

Our school nurses will continue to insist that children with influenza-like illness stay home until 24 hours after the last signs of fever. If you're called to pick up your child please do so as quickly as possible. We will do everything possible to minimize risks to unaffected children.

As you previously have been made aware, the symptoms are similar to seasonal flu and may include: fever greater than 100°F; sore throat; cough; stuffy nose; chills; fatigue; headache; and body aches.

Basic precautions everyone should be taking to prevent illness or the spread of illness include: staying home from work or school if you are sick; covering your coughs or sneezes with your sleeve; and washing your hands frequently. Finally, I want to emphasize again that it is important for you to prepare now for the probability that you will be required to provide home care for a sick child. School officials will be firm about ensuring that students with symptoms are not allowed to attend school.

Please remain diligent about good prevention efforts. We will work closely with local health officials to minimize any community impact. A new statewide 2-1-1 call system is operating to address any immediate questions. Meanwhile, please call your child's school nurse with any specific concerns.

Sincerely,

Michael W. Delahanty
Superintendent of Schools