

H1N1 Update

October 7, 2009

Dear Parent,

As you may know, we are seeing an increased number of student and staff absences due to illnesses in our schools. However, while there are higher than normal absences in some schools, it is not widespread across our school system and only a small number of absences are related to the flu.

Students and staff work together in confined spaces, so schools generally see a higher illness rate among students than among the general population. Accordingly, school-age children are among the first groups most affected by any contagious illness in the community.

As I have already communicated to you, we are working closely with the Carroll County Health Department to monitor outbreaks of illness in our schools and in our community. Together with the health department, we will monitor flu and other illness conditions and make decisions about the best steps to take.

We have already completed the first round of seasonal Flu-Mist vaccine administration in our elementary schools and expect to offer the H1N1 (Swine Flu) Flu-Mist vaccine program to elementary students in November. We are working with the Carroll County Health Department to set up regional H1N1 vaccine clinics in some of our high schools and middle schools to help provide the H1N1 Flu vaccine to the rest of the Carroll County community.

Since some schools are seeing a rise in student absenteeism, it is now more important than ever for you to follow these good prevention tips.

Teach your children to wash their hands often with soap and water. You can set a good example by doing this yourself.

Teach your children not to share personal items like drinks, food or unwashed utensils, and to cover their coughs and sneezes with tissues. If they don't have a tissue, they should cough or sneeze into their upper sleeve, not their hands.

Know the signs and symptoms of the flu. Symptoms of the flu include fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit or greater), cough, sore throat, a runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, and feeling very tired. Some people may also vomit or have diarrhea.

Don't send children to school if they are sick. Any children who are sick at school may be sent home. Having children stay home when sick allows them to rest and helps you to monitor their health closely. Keeping your sick child home protects fellow students and school staff.

Closing Schools

The State Health Officer has informed us recently that closing schools to stop the spread of illness, including the flu, is not justified. Therefore, the only reason I would consider closing any school is if the number of staff or student absences exceeded the number we need to safely operate our schools.

For more information on the flu, visit www.flu.gov, or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.

We will notify you of any additional changes to our school system's strategy to prevent the spread of flu.

Sincerely,

Chuck Ecker