

H1N1 Flu Update

October 15, 2009

Dear Parent,

We are receiving questions and concerns from parents about the H1N1 flu, including our FluMist vaccine program. It appears that there is a lot of misinformation about the H1N1 flu and our response as a school system. Therefore, this communication will focus on correcting this misinformation and also give you an H1N1 update.

Safety of the H1N1 FluMist Vaccine

Several parents have expressed concern that administering FluMist at school will spread the flu to otherwise healthy children. Dr. Elizabeth Ruff, Deputy Health Officer for the Carroll County Health Department, tells us that the H1N1 flu virus used to make the vaccine is weakened so that it is not able to cause influenza in the person receiving the vaccine, or in anyone with whom they are in close contact.

I have also heard concerns that FluMist should not be given to anyone who will be in close contact with an immunocompromised individual. Dr. Ruff informs us that this is only for severely immunosuppressed persons. An example would include a person who has just received a transplant and is in protective isolation and cannot leave the house. Please contact your physician if you need additional information.

Cleaning Schools

We clean our schools daily with hospital grade disinfectant that has been approved by the State Health Department for use in schools. As I stated in my last email, we cannot allow any other "non-approved" cleaners in our schools. It is very possible that the use of "non-approved" cleaners will cause a negative reaction or neutralize the effectiveness of the disinfectant that has already been applied.

Please note that the Centers for Disease Control advises that no special cleaning is needed to combat the H1N1 virus. The best way to prevent getting any virus is to work together as a community and practice the common sense tips I have been including in these emails.

Community Notification of H1N1 Cases in the School System

Some parents have expressed concern that we are not reporting the number of H1N1 flu cases in their child's school. I understand and appreciate the desire of parents to keep their children healthy. However, reporting illness in a school to the community as a way of protecting children is problematic. First, the law prohibits us from sharing any individual student or employee medical information.

Second, most physicians are not even testing for the H1N1 flu. In addition, the H1N1 flu is not a reportable illness. Even if we did collect the information, we could not verify its accuracy. To sum it up, reporting schools with H1N1 flu serves no positive purpose. It only adds to the misinformation about this virus. Remember, schools are directly affected by the community they serve. If there is illness in the community, it will show up in schools. If you have children with immune deficiencies and are worried about illness in school, please consult with their physician regarding school attendance.

Tracking Employee and Student Attendance

We have begun providing both student and employee attendance data to the Health Department. The Centers for Disease Control has requested that local school systems track student and employee attendance and provide data to the Health Department on a daily basis. In this way, any dramatic increases in absenteeism can be tracked and monitored to see how the virus is moving through our state and the nation.

While we have seen an increase in student absences over the past week, our total system-wide student attendance has not dropped below 90%.

The best way to keep your family healthy is to:

- **Teach your children to wash their hands often** with soap and water. You can set a good example by doing this yourself. If soap and water are not available, encourage them to carry and use their personal hand sanitizers.
- **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. They will be isolated until they can leave school. Students with a fever need to remain at home until they are fever free for 24 hours without fever reducing medicine.

Information on the H1N1 vaccination programs was provided to you in a previous communication. You can find that information on our website at:

<http://www.carrollk12.org/admin/commedia/h1n1.asp>

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

We will continue to provide you with updated information and notify you of any additional changes to our school system's strategy to prevent the spread of flu.

Sincerely,
Chuck Ecker