

October 2, 2009

Dear Staff Members,

I'm writing to update you on the district's efforts to plan and prepare for a possible resurgence of the H1N1 (swine) flu virus in our schools. Last spring, we had a scattering of cases of H1N1 flu in our schools.

We do not know how many students or staff will be affected in the coming months, but we are being vigilant. We know that some communities in Washington have seen an increase in influenza-like illnesses, and we are planning ahead in case the same happens in our community.

Our health services staff continues to work closely with the Seattle – King County Health Department and state and federal agencies, and a team of district officials has been assembled to move quickly to respond to the needs of our staff, students and parents if an outbreak occurs.

Please note that the Seattle King County Public Health Department no longer requires that a school or daycare be closed when a child has a suspected case of H1N1. The decision to close a school or multiple schools **may** be made at the district level, with input from the health department.

#### **What if a student or staff person becomes ill at school?**

Based on current Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations, we want to make sure our staff is knowledgeable of the symptoms of H1N1 flu. The number one symptom to look for is a fever above 100 degrees F. Other symptoms that indicate you or someone else may have the flu are listed at [www.fwps.org/info/health](http://www.fwps.org/info/health).

Your vigilance in watching for students or adults with possible flu symptoms is essential in reducing the spread of the virus. We also need you to self-monitor on a daily basis. If you have a fever, especially if it is above 100 degrees F., please do not come in to school. Call or login to the web center for a substitute. If you are able to, also call your office manager or principal to give them a heads-up that you'll be out.

As always, when students become ill while at school, we will isolate them from others, and contact parents to get them transported home as quickly as possible. Staff will also be asked to go home if they develop symptoms of the flu. **Children and staff should remain at home for 24 hours after the fever/signs of fever are no longer present**, without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

While students are waiting to be picked up, they will be moved to a room separate from other students or staff. They may also be asked to wear a surgical mask to prevent droplets from spreading when they cough, if they can tolerate it. (This is a new procedure and will be implemented if there is not a separate room or a room with enough space to keep the child 3-6 feet from others.) Wearing surgical masks is not recommended if you are well.

**Like the seasonal flu, symptoms of the H1N1 flu may not be apparent for the first two days a person is infected. What can we do to protect ourselves if someone is not visibly ill?**

1. **Shield yourself and those around you from the seasonal flu by getting a flu shot.** The Health Department says that anyone who wishes to get a season flu shot can, and probably should. It is available now. You'll stay healthier and stronger to fight other infections that are circulating.

The H1N1 vaccine is expected to be available beginning this month. The CDC and the health department are issuing guidelines about who will be eligible to receive the first wave of H1N1 shots. If you are among the groups considered at higher risk for complications from the H1N1 virus, you'll be among the first who will get the shot. Public health indicates additional vaccine should be received by the end of October. More information is on the Seattle-King County Public Health webpage, [www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/preparedness/pandemicflu/swineflu.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/preparedness/pandemicflu/swineflu.aspx).

2. **Make it a practice to sneeze or cough into a tissue, elbow or sleeve.** Keep tissues close at hand and use them if possible. Throw the tissue in the trash after use. Teach your children and your students to do the same.
3. **Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze.** Wash for 20 seconds, or as long as it takes to sing the ABC song or Happy Birthday, twice. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective, unless the hands are visibly dirty. Hand sanitizer is available at our schools.
4. **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.** These are great entry portals for germs.

**You should also develop a personal plan for home.** If you or your children get the flu, you should have a plan regarding who will provide care. The health department offers an 8-page booklet on getting ready for the flu at [www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/preparedness/pandemicflu/getready.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/preparedness/pandemicflu/getready.aspx).

**If you or anyone in your family has a higher risk of complications from the flu,** please contact your physician about having a plan for care. This may include prearranging for a prescription for an antiviral medication such as Tamiflu being called in for you if you do develop early symptoms of the flu. Go to [www.fwps.org/info/health/conditions.html](http://www.fwps.org/info/health/conditions.html) to see a list of conditions that could make you at higher risk for complications.

The district's team will continue to monitor developments in procedures suggested by public health and the CDC. I encourage you to watch for future communications regarding H1N1 in our schools, and check the website frequently. Stay well.

Sincerely,

Mark Davidson, Deputy Superintendent