

September 28, 2009

Dear Federal Way Public Schools Parents and Guardians,

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.

We do not know how many students or staff will be affected during this coming school year. Last spring, we had a scattering of cases of H1N1 flu in our schools. But, given the rise in the number of cases on the East Coast and in some areas of our state, we are planning ahead with the assumption that we will see some impact on student and staff attendance.

Our health services staff continues to work closely with the Seattle – King County Health Department and state and federal agencies. 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.

How can I help prevent an outbreak of the H1N1 or seasonal flu in my child's school?

Parents, you are the first line of prevention. Although it can be a real inconvenience, by keeping your child home when he or she appears to be sick, you will be doing everyone else a great favor. Students begin mingling with other students on the bus and at school before they see our school staff. By the time we are alerted to an ill child, dozens of others may have been exposed. There are several symptoms of the flu, but there is one in particular we need you to watch for – a fever.

Please - take the time to check your kids for a fever every morning and evening. Anyone who has a fever, especially if it is above 100 degrees F,* should stay home. Do NOT send your child to school or daycare with a fever. Other symptoms that indicate that you or your child may have the flu are listed on the district webpage, www.fwps.org/info/health. **Children (and staff) should remain at home for 24 hours after the fever or signs of fever are no longer present**, without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

However, 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 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 seasonal 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 in mid-October, 2009 for individuals considered at highest risk for complications from the H1N1 virus. By the end of October, additional doses will be available. More information about this is on the Seattle-King County Public Health webpage: <http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/preparedness/pandemicflu/swineflu.aspx>.

2. **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.
5. **Clean and disinfect frequently-touched surfaces.** Viruses can survive on surfaces for several hours and may be transferred to someone else who touches the surface. Because of this, the health department recommends frequent cleaning and disinfecting of often-touched surfaces. More details can be found under *Prevention Measures We Can All Take* at <http://www.fwps.org/info/health/>.

Have 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. You can download and print the document, or order printed copies at the following website:

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/preparedness/pandemicflu/getready.aspx>.

What if my child becomes ill at school?

When a student becomes ill at school, we isolate him or her from others, and contact the parent to arrange transportation home as quickly as possible. If it appears he or she may have the flu, the student 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.

Schools are not equipped or staffed to care for large numbers of sick children. We will provide students who are ill with comfort and care until a parent can arrive. Again, we ask that you avoid sending your child if he or she shows signs of being sick. If you get a call from the school that your child is sick, please pick him or her up as quickly as possible.

The CDC is monitoring H1N1 and will provide further recommendations for school districts if the warranted. The district's team is monitoring all developments. Please watch for future communications regarding H1N1 and your family's health, and check the district website frequently. Stay well.

Sincerely,

Mark Davidson, Deputy Superintendent