

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF OKALOOSA COUNTY

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
ALEXIS TIBBETTS, Ed.D.

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August 21, 2009

Dear Parent,

As we move into the new school year, I want to take this opportunity to advise you of the current status of the H1N1 flu virus, also commonly known as swine flu. This new flu, which began infecting students and adults alike in the spring of this year, has continued to be detected in school age children throughout the summer in camps, schools, and child care settings. We believe that we will be seeing influenza like illness (including H1N1 Swine Flu) in our school system when students return to class. Preparations for a vaccine that will protect against H1N1 Swine flu are underway, yet the vaccine will not be available until late October.

We can, however, take several steps together to reduce the number of students that become infected until the vaccine is available. The following questions will help you recognize influenza-like illness in your family, so you can take steps to keep ill children out of school which will help stop the spread of the disease.

What are the symptoms of the H1N1 flu virus?

The new strain of flu has the same symptoms of the "seasonal" flu that has been circulating in the country over the past years. You or your child may experience a sudden onset of fever (higher than 100), cough, runny nose, sore throat, and all over body aches. Many persons have reported experiencing diarrhea as well. If you or your child has these symptoms, you can assume you have the flu. The symptoms will usually last 4-5 days, but you can spread the virus for up to seven days after the onset of symptoms.

How can parents help reduce the number of flu cases in our schools and communities?

- **Keep sick children at home.** If your child exhibits flu-like symptoms, keep them home from all activities such as after school programs, dances, movies, and other events where people gather. Contact your primary care health provider or county health department for further instructions. It is important that your child does not return to school for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever without the use of fever reducing medicines that contain acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen (such as Motrin). Children or teenagers with flu symptoms should not be given Aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid).
- **Stay home when you are sick.** Limit your contact with other people. Again, contact your primary care health provider or county health department for instructions.
- **Cover coughs and sneezes.** Teach your child to cover their coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of the elbow. Dispose of used tissues properly, and then wash hands thoroughly. Practice these steps and use them every time you cough or sneeze.

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- **Wash hands with soap and water.** Teach your child to wash their hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds (singing the "Happy Birthday" song twice). Set a good example by doing this yourself.
- **Teach your child the proper use of hand sanitizer.** Gels, rubs, and hand wipes work well, as long as they contain at least 60% alcohol. Dispose of hand wipes properly. Always read and follow label instructions when using hand sanitizer. Hand sanitizer has been placed in every classroom in our district.
- **Get a seasonal flu shot.** Regular seasonal flu vaccine should be available in September, and although it will not protect against the H1N1 Swine flu, it will help minimize the chance that your child, classmates, school faculty and staff may take the flu home to their families.

Is there a vaccine for this flu?

Our Federal partners are getting very close to the manufacture of a vaccine to immunize against H1N1 Swine Flu, and they anticipate it to become available later this fall. The vast majority of people in the world are not protected against this new virus, and therefore, larger numbers of people will need to be vaccinated. So that the vaccine is used in the most effective manner, we will follow Federal guidelines and first vaccinate people in certain age groups, and those with specific medical conditions or occupations. Within this group are children ages 6 months to 24 years.

Okaloosa County School District is working with our local Health Department to identify the groups that will receive vaccinations and then the places and times it will be available. If your child or members of your family are in one of those groups that are identified for vaccination, we recommend you follow federal and state recommendations and get vaccinated. Information about vaccination locations, dates, and times will be on our website when the vaccine is made available to our district.

Parents, in closing let me reassure you we are doing everything possible to protect your children but you must help us. There is no reason for alarm, but we must stay informed and exercise good hand hygiene and respirator etiquette. School staff has been advised to call parents immediately if a child at school is suffering from flu-like symptoms. Your child will be isolated until they are picked up. Be sure your contact information is valid and accurate and you are available to pick your child up immediately if called.

We thank you in advance for working with us this school year to keep our schools healthy. For more information about H1N1 Swine Flu, visit www.cdc.gov/H1N1 or www.MyFluSafety.com or call the toll-free H1N1 Swine Flu information line in Florida at 1-877-FLA-FLU1 (1-877-352-3581).

Sincerely,



Alexis Tibbetts, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools