

August 24, 2009

Dear Parents:

It is likely that you have read and heard a lot lately about the H1N1 flu and the role schools will play this fall as the virus impacts our community. While H1N1 remains a health concern, public health officials in Georgia and across the nation have downgraded the initial alarm about the virus. In Georgia healthcare providers are no longer testing every case specifically for this strain of influenza.

With the school year under way and students again in close proximity, already we are seeing students with flu-like symptoms in our school. This is common at most schools in our district and throughout the metro area. H1N1 is very similar to other strains of flu, and it can be treated.

Because healthcare providers are not always testing for H1N1, we will not know every case of H1N1 flu that occurs. But it should be assumed that H1N1 is currently in our community, including schools. We will treat H1N1 cases as we would any other cases of flu, which means we do not plan to send out individual letters with every confirmed case. I want to remind you that if your child begins to show flu-like symptoms, it is important that you keep your child home and not allow him or her to return to school until at least 24 hours have passed without fever. Below is more information about H1N1 and how you can help prevent the spread of flu.

What is H1N1 flu?

H1N1 flu (Swine Flu) is a respiratory illness that is caused by a Type A influenza virus. H1N1 is a new strain of flu that is a mix of swine, human and bird viruses. You cannot get H1N1 flu from eating pork or pork products.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 flu?

The signs and symptoms of H1N1 flu are similar to regular flu. Symptoms appear quickly, likely including dry cough, fever (sometimes over 102 degrees), stuffy nose, chills, extreme tiredness and body aches. Some people have reported symptoms of nausea, vomiting and diarrhea with H1N1 flu.

What should I do if my child has signs or symptoms of influenza?

If your child gets a fever or flu-like symptoms, it is important that he/she stays home, rests and drinks plenty of fluids. Please do not give children fever-reducing medication and send them to school. The medication wears off and fevers and aches return. Never give aspirin to children or teens who have fever and/or flu-like symptoms because this can cause a rare, serious illness called Reye syndrome. Thorough hand washing with soap and water is the best prevention, in addition to the flu vaccine.

What are Cobb County Schools doing to prevent the spread of influenza?

The District is encouraging staff and students to practice good hygiene, including proper hand washing techniques. We encourage students to use hand sanitizer with 60 percent alcohol content in situations where hand washing facilities are not immediately available. The CDC also provides information on how to get immunization against influenza and H1N1 flu.

How can you help prevent the spread of the disease?

- Staying home from school or work if ill. Students and staff will remain at home until fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- Avoiding close contact with those who are ill.
- Hand Hygiene – washing your hands with soap and water or using hand sanitizers often.
- Covering your mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Practicing good health habits, i.e., getting plenty of sleep, physical activity, fluids, nutritious eating and managing stress.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has compiled the most up-to-date and accurate information about H1N1 Flu on a Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>. There is also a link to the CDC information on the home page of your child's school Web site.

The Cobb County School District works closely with Cobb & Douglas Public Health (CDPD), a division of the state public health department. CDPH has also posted information about H1N1 flu on its web site at: <http://cobbanddouglaspublichealth.org/News/swineflu.php>. We are following CDPH's guidance as the progression of this flu changes frequently.

Additionally, our custodial staff and teachers are cleaning classrooms and classroom furniture with an antiviral and antibacterial solution. We will continue this practice in our school building.

The Cobb County School District will continue to make families aware of the impact of influenza on our school environments. Awareness and prevention are the best means of helping our community stay healthy.

Sincerely,

Linda Keeney,
Principal