

October 21, 2009

Dear Parents:

We have been monitoring our student attendance at school on a regular basis as requested by the NYS and Albany County Departments of Health as part of the 2009 H1N1 influenza response plan. Influenza-like illness can be caused by the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus, the seasonal influenza virus, or other respiratory infections. However, national surveillance data has shown that the vast majority of influenza-like illness circulating in the United States at this time is H1N1 influenza.

Albany County Health Department officials are working closely with our school nurse on strategies that reduce the spread of flu. Our goal is to keep you, your children, and our school community healthy. We really need your help to do this. Therefore, as an important reminder, we ask that you take the following steps:

- **Know the signs and symptoms of the influenza.** Symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, a runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, and feeling very tired. Some people may also have nausea or vomiting and not everyone will have fever.
- **Keep sick children home** while they have flu symptoms and for 24 hours after the fever goes away, without the use of fever-reducing medicine. Keeping sick students at home means that they keep their viruses to themselves rather than sharing them with others.
- **Teach your children to wash their hands** often with soap and water. You can set a good example by doing this yourself. The use of hand gels (with or without alcohol) may also be helpful at times when hand washing isn't possible.
- **Teach your children to cover their mouths** when they cough or sneeze. Give them tissues to use. When tissues are not available, teach them to cover up their cough or sneezes by using the inside of their elbow or arm instead of their hands.
- **Teach your children not to share personal items** like toothbrushes, drinks, food, or unwashed utensils.
- **If your child has chronic health problems** and displays flu-like symptoms, contact your healthcare provider immediately. Your provider may decide to order an antiviral medication for your child.
- **Get your child vaccinated for both the seasonal flu and the 2009 H1N1 flu when vaccine becomes available.** A flu vaccine is the single best way to protect against influenza illness.
 - Seasonal flu is the typical flu that is seen during yearly flu seasons. It is still early in the flu season and there is time to receive the vaccine. Currently

many doctors are experiencing a delay in receiving shipments of the seasonal flu vaccine, so please be patient. You may contact your health care provider or visit www.albanycounty.com/health for more information about seasonal flu clinics.

- 2009 H1N1 is the new flu strain of influenza. Children are considered a priority group and are strongly recommended to get this vaccine. Initially, the 2009 H1N1 vaccine will be available through health care providers. The Albany County Department of Health is also planning to conduct community mass vaccination clinics as soon as more 2009 H1N1 vaccine is available. The dates and locations of public H1N1 vaccination clinics will be widely publicized.

It is important for all parents and caregivers of our students to plan ahead for child care at home in case your child gets sick. If your child does get sick, monitor his or her health as well as the health of any other children in the household by checking for fever and other flu-like symptoms.

Thank you very much for your continued cooperation.

Yours truly,

Regina Ingle-Brown, RN