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A tradition of excellence.



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September 11, 2009

H1N1 Flu

Dear School Staff:

During this school year, more people than usual in our schools and communities are likely to be getting sick with the flu (influenza). In addition to the regular "seasonal" influenza that comes around every fall, we expect many cases of the novel H1N1 influenza that first appeared last spring. Novel H1N1 flu never completely went away over the summer, and we are already hearing about cases of influenza-like illness in schools in Minnesota.

Right now, H1N1 appears to be acting like seasonal influenza in terms of how sick it makes people and how it is spread. Most people who have had novel H1N1 flu in Minnesota have recovered without complications. However, like any flu virus, novel H1N1 can be a serious disease. Some people have been hospitalized with novel H1N1, and several deaths have occurred from it. Most people who had novel H1N1 in Minnesota have been school-aged children. People at high risk for complications from influenza (including seasonal and novel H1N1 influenza) are those with underlying medical conditions (such as neurological or neuromuscular disease, heart, lung or kidney disease, asthma, diabetes, or a suppressed immune system), pregnant women, children under 5 years of age (especially those under age 2) or people age 65 years or older.

Influenza spreads when a person with the flu coughs or sneezes. We are asking that you help prevent the spread of influenza at Chisago Lakes Schools by taking the following important steps:

1. **Stay home if you have symptoms of the flu.** That means a fever of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or greater, with cough and/or a sore throat. Staff who develop these symptoms during the school day should promptly make arrangements to go home. Other symptoms that may occur with flu include runny nose, headache, body aches, vomiting and diarrhea (in addition to fever and cough or sore throat).
2. **You should stay home** for at least 24 hours *after* your fever is gone without use of fever-reducing drugs like acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin). Usually that means staying home for 5 to 7 days. When you stay home with flu symptoms, you should also avoid contact with others except to get medical care. This includes staying away from after-school and other activities.

Some additional important points:

- You should stay home until your fever has been gone for 24 hours even if you are on antiviral drugs such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza) or have had a flu test that is negative. Flu tests are not always accurate.
 - When you return to school after an influenza-like illness, you will still be able to spread the illness, although less easily than when you had fever and flu symptoms. To avoid spreading the virus, it is very important to clean your hands frequently, and cover coughs and sneezes with a sleeve or tissue.
3. **If you are at high risk for complications from influenza, you should plan to take some additional precautions.** This includes pregnant women, people with chronic health problems like asthma,

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diabetes, heart or lung disease, metabolic conditions, neurologic and neuromuscular disorders, and people age 65 or older. If you are not sure if you are at higher risk, please check with a doctor.

If you are at high risk:

- Contact your doctor immediately if you develop flu symptoms. If you need antiviral drugs; starting within two days of symptoms is important to get the best response.
- Contact your doctor to see whether antiviral drugs are needed if you have close contact with others who have flu symptoms.
- Remember that others returning to school after a flu-like illness may still be able to spread the virus. Talk to your doctor now to develop a plan for flu that meets your individual health needs.
- If someone else in your household is at high risk for complications from influenza, their doctor should be consulted to discuss a plan for what to do if they have close contact with someone with flu symptoms or develop flu symptoms.

4. **Get vaccinated.** The Minnesota Department of Health recommends vaccination for regular, seasonal influenza. This step is especially critical for people who are at high risk of influenza-related complications.

A separate vaccination will be needed for novel H1N1 influenza. The vaccine is likely to be available in late September or October. First priority for H1N1 vaccination will be given to pregnant women, people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age, people age 6 months to 24 years, people 25 through 64 years of age with chronic health disorders or weakened immune systems, and health care providers. It is likely that two doses of H1N1 vaccine will be needed, given several weeks apart.

5. **If you have school-aged children**, plan ahead of time for child care arrangements for at least 7 days in case your child develops flu symptoms. Ask us for the “Dear Parent” letter we sent out to parents that has recommendations for children and the coming influenza season. It also is available at:

- <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/flu/school/index.html>

Remember do not use aspirin or aspirin containing products in children who may have influenza.

6. **Learn how to care for a person with flu symptoms at home and when to seek medical attention.** Check the CDC and MDH websites:

- http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance_homecare.htm
- <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/flu/h1n1/basics/care>

7. **Watch for students who become sick** during the school day and send them to the school health office for further evaluation.
8. **Staff and students should clean their hands** often, with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. Soap and water are needed if hands are soiled. Remind students to clean hands and set aside enough time for them to do so. This is very important for all students and staff – those who are well and those who are coming back to school after being sick.
9. **Staff and students should cover coughs and sneezes** using a tissue when one is available, or cough or sneeze into an elbow or arm. Hands should not be used to cover a cough or sneeze. Staff should teach and encourage students to appropriately cover their coughs and sneezes.

10. **Staff and students should avoid sharing personal items.** That includes items like drinks, food or eating utensils.
11. **Clean surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact such as desks, door knobs, and keyboards.** The Minnesota Department of Health recommends routine cleaning of commonly used areas or frequently touched surfaces, regardless of occurrence of influenza cases. Cleaning/disinfection should be performed using EPA-registered products and according to manufacturer instructions. When cleaning and disinfecting make sure you follow package instructions for contact time and dilution.

If novel H1N1 influenza begins causing more severe disease, some of the recommendations in this letter may change. For example, staff with flu symptoms may need to stay home longer – up to seven days, regardless of when their fever goes away. Some schools may even need to close, for as long as seven days or more. We will keep you informed if any of these steps become necessary.

For more information, visit the Minnesota Department of Health website at www.health.state.mn.us or the federal flu website at www.flu.gov. For more information about influenza in our community and what Chisago Lakes School District is doing, visit <http://www.chisagolakes.k12.mn.us> or call Jane Jacobson, School Nurse at 651-213-2536.

Thank you for your assistance in helping to reduce the spread of influenza in our school. We look forward to a productive school year.

Sincerely,



Dr. Michael McLoughlin
Superintendent