



Bethlehem Central
School District

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Dr. Michael D.
Tebbano
Superintendent

DISTRICT SHARING H1N1 FLU VIRUS INFORMATION WITH PARENTS

September 15, 2009

Dear Parents:

With the continued focus in the public health community on preparing for the potential spread of the H1N1 flu virus — referred to as “swine flu” earlier this year —it is important that I make you aware of some H1N1 information and resources as the school year gets underway. There is no way to know or control whether, or to what extent, this virus may affect our community. Yet, we can all work together to share information, minimize panic, and take basic steps to help limit the spread of illness.

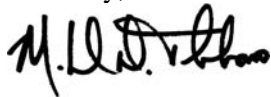
At this time, I want to make sure all parents and staff members are aware of the following points of information:

1. **This flu spreads easily.** By some predictions, it will infect 30 percent or more of the country’s population. So far, children ages 5 to 24 seem to be more vulnerable to H1N1. The good news, however, is that the H1N1 flu is generally mild and most people have recovered fairly quickly (3-5 days). Severe or serious side effects are possible for both children and adults who have other health issues. (If you have questions about health factors that may increase risk, please consult your physician.)
2. **Incidences of students and staff with flu-like symptoms will not automatically close school.** Recent guidance from the Centers for Disease Control asks schools to balance the risk of illness among students and staff with the benefits of keeping students in school when deciding if school will be closed. The district will be closely monitoring incidences of flu-related absences in the district and will be working closely with state and local health agencies to ensure it has the best and most recent guidance and that decisions are made in the best interest of students and staff.
3. **Have a plan: Children and faculty and staff members exhibiting flu-like symptoms must stay home from school; students who are ill at school will be sent home.** The most effective way to prevent the spread of any illness is for those affected to stay away from school, work, and other group settings. I strongly encourage parents to discuss a contingency plan now for the event that your child must stay home from school or leave school in the middle of the day due to illness. The district recognizes that this can present challenges for working families, however, our responsibility is to maintain the healthiest school environment possible. Please also note that, the district will review its attendance policies with regard to academic credit if circumstances surrounding the H1N1 virus require enhanced flexibility this year.
4. **Students and staff members who experience any flu-like illness should remain at home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever or signs of a fever.** This should be determined without the use of fever reducing medications. This guidance, recently released by the CDC, is a change from a previous guideline of staying home for 7 days after symptoms began.
5. **We should all be washing our hands often and exercising appropriate cough/sneeze etiquette.** When coughing and sneezing, children, as well as adults, should cover their mouth with a tissue. If one is not available, coughing and sneezing should be done into one’s elbow. I encourage you to reinforce these practices with your children.

6. **Please stay informed.** Parents can visit the district's Web site for links to additional resources, including the federal government's H1N1 resource page at www.flu.gov, frequently asked questions, and the district's "Guidelines for Keeping Your Child Home from School," adopted by the Board of Education as part of the district's pandemic flu planning efforts.
7. **The district will not be in a position to notify parents every time a student has a flu-like illness.** Parents should not expect this. As we mentioned, the district will be closely monitoring incidences of flu-related absences and will be working closely with local and state health agencies, and will be making parents aware of information and updates as necessary.
8. **Sign-up for the district's School News Notifier.** This situation is expected to evolve. Should any circumstance require a direct and immediate notification to parents, the district will use SNN to make this announcement. You can sign up for the system at <https://snn.neric.org/bcsd/>; Please be sure you have selected the emergency delays and closings option.
9. **Consult your physician, including with regard to vaccinations.** According to the CDC, an H1N1 vaccine is expected to be available sometime this fall. The demand for this vaccine could exceed the available supply, and we are told that vaccination of school-age children will be a priority. While we are hearing that there may be vaccination clinics at some schools (and will happily participate in this if asked to do so by county or state health agencies), we remind parents that your first line of defense on any health-related issue should always be your family physician. While we wait for details to be announced by health authorities, vaccination is a subject you may wish to discuss with your family physician.

Finally, thank you. As we look forward to a great year, we also must work in partnership to protect the health and well being of our students. Please know that there is no higher priority for our district. If you have questions, please contact us.

Sincerely,



Dr. Michael D. Tebbano
Superintendent