

August 27, 2009

Dear Parent,

Influenza (also known as Novel H1N1, swine flu and the North American flu) will undoubtedly be an issue for our school district this year. To help keep your family informed about the flu and to help prevent its spread, our district has teamed with the Berrien County Health Department to monitor flu conditions and to make decisions about the best steps to take concerning schools.

It is our collective goal to keep our district's schools open and operating as usual during the upcoming flu season; however to accomplish this goal, we will need your help. Here are a few things you can do to reduce the spread of the flu (or any illness):

- **Teach your children to wash their hands** often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. You can set a good example by doing this yourself.
- **Teach your children not to share personal items** like drinks, food or unwashed utensils, and to cover their coughs and sneezes with tissues. Covering up their coughs or sneezes using the elbow, arm or sleeve instead of the hand when a tissue is unavailable is also good practice.
- **Know the signs and symptoms of the flu.** Symptoms of the flu include fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit, 37.8 degrees Celsius or greater), cough, sore throat, a runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, and feeling very tired. Some people may also vomit or have diarrhea.
- **Keep sick children at home** for at least 24 hours *after* they no longer have fever or do not have signs of fever, without using fever-reducing drugs. Keeping children with a fever at home will reduce the number of people who may get infected.
- **Do not send children to school if they are sick.** Any children who are determined to be sick while at school *will be sent home*.

School personnel will also work to ensure hygiene opportunities are made available to students throughout their school day. Staff members who are sick will be asked to stay home, and when available, school personnel will be offered immunizations.

Our district and the Health Department are prepared should there be a significant outbreak of the flu. **Please note that the presence of cases of H1N1 will not trigger a school closure.** Closures will be based on absence rates, staffing issues and community health information.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the flu, please contact your medical provider. Additionally, it may be helpful for parents to attend an upcoming community forum hosted by Berrien Regional Education Service Agency on Wednesday, September 23 at 7 pm. The forum is called "Educational Precautions: Keeping your Child Healthy & Safe while in School." Included in the forum will be a discussion about the H1N1 virus presented by the Health Department. To register for the event, please contact Berrien RESA at (269) 471-7725. The event will be held at Berrien RESA's Conference Center in Berrien Springs, however two videoconference satellite locations will be made available to community members; one at Niles High School Auditorium and at Lakeshore High School.

Thank you for your cooperation. We look forward to a healthy and great school year!

Sincerely,



Superintendent, Berrien County Health Department