

June 16, 2009

End of School Year Update For Parents Regarding H1N1 Influenza Virus

Since the new H1N1 influenza virus began to circulate in New Hampshire in early May, the NH Department of Health and Human Services and the NH Department of Education have been working closely together and updating schools about this virus. The World Health Organization has indicated we are at the start of a 2009 influenza pandemic. This declaration is an indicator of how widespread the transmission of this virus is, not its severity: <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/>

At this point, we know that:

- Seasonal influenza is commonly seen in schools and daycares every year, but most illnesses occur in the cooler months.
- This year we have a new strain of influenza circulating called H1N1 and it has been shown to disproportionately affect school-aged children and young adults.
- H1N1 influenza causes illness very much like regular seasonal influenza. People who are ill with H1N1 influenza can get fever, chills, cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, and sometimes nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.
- Most people infected with this new virus have recovered without the need for medical care.
- High risk groups like very young children, pregnant women, the elderly, individuals with underlying medical conditions such as asthma, chronic lung and heart conditions, cancer and diabetes etc should consult with a health care provider if they have signs of influenza.
- H1N1 influenza is circulating in NH communities now. Cases have occurred across NH in most counties and most cases are not related to travel outside of the state. Therefore, it is important to take measures to control the spread of infections whether or not a case of H1N1 influenza is identified in your community.
- NH DHHS does not recommend that districts notify all parents each time there is a case, because at this time, one can assume that it is possible to be exposed to H1N1 influenza at school, work, or anywhere else in the community.
- The best way to stop the spread of H1N1 is good hygiene. Teach your kids, and follow these steps yourself:
 - Wash your hands frequently (15-20 seconds with soap and warm water) or use 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizing gels
 - Always cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or cough into your elbow/shoulder and always throw away used tissues into a trashcan
 - If you have not washed your hands, avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
 - Do not share drinking/eating containers or utensils
 - Avoid contact with ill persons if possible
 - Monitor your own health

- Stay home if you are ill. Do not return to work, school, or social activities until you have been asymptomatic for 24 hours

The NH DHHS is working with the NH Department of Education to prepare schools and daycares for the fall influenza season. Public Health Experts are concerned that H1N1 could become more severe in the fall. Our school district continues to stay informed and is well prepared to respond. Nationally, steps are being taken to create a vaccine for possible use in the fall. Our district will continue to take extra measures to ensure commonly touched surfaces are disinfected. We will also continue to have strict exclusion policies for students and staff with flu-like illnesses. In the fall, we will do our part to promote influenza vaccinations for all students and staff.

Over the summer, please continue to stay informed about this new strain of influenza. For more information and resources, please go to: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/> or http://www.dhhs.state.nh.us/DHHS/DHHS_SITE/swineflu.htm

For more information, please contact the NH Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health Services, Communicable Disease Control Section @ 603-271-4496 or In NH 1-800-852-3345 Ext 4496.

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