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November 2, 2009

Dear Parents:

I am writing to update you on the flu situation in New Hampshire and in our school system.

For several weeks, NH has been among the states where the Centers for Disease Control is reporting widespread influenza-like illness. In addition, the NH Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is tracking school absences around the state. We know that absences due to flu-like symptoms are increasing and that health care providers' offices are becoming much busier. In short, it is clear that the flu is in our communities, that it is spreading, and that more people will probably be affected before it peaks. Most cases of flu-like illnesses are now due to the H1N1 virus. We don't know whether the usual "seasonal" flu will arrive later in the fall/winter.

School administrators and nurses continue to be in close touch with the NH DHHS regarding appropriate policies dealing with prevention and management of illness in our schools. **Public health officials continue to stress the importance of personal hygiene, including frequent hand-washing, coughing into your sleeve, not sharing food or eating utensils, etc.**

There are currently no routine recommendations to close schools in NH because of illness or to keep healthy children home from school. However, it is important for children and staff who are sick to stay home from school, as well as from special events such as dances, birthday parties, family events, and other public gatherings. Children should stay home unless seeking medical care until they have no fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine. If any family members who are pregnant, have asthma or any other underlying health condition become sick with flu like symptoms, they are advised to contact a health care provider at the onset of these symptoms.

Sick students will not be penalized for staying home. All of the principals in our school district will make sure that students have ample opportunity to make up missed work. Students do not need to provide a doctor's note to explain their absence, but we do ask that parents contact their children's school to let us know that they are out because of illness and to report whether they have flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, headache, body aches, sometimes vomiting and diarrhea).

We also encourage all students and staff to get both the seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines, if possible. This is especially important for children with chronic illnesses such as asthma and other underlying health conditions, as well as for pregnant women. Unfortunately, vaccine supplies all over the country are limited due to manufacturing delays. We understand that many families have been frustrated by their inability to obtain vaccines for their children after being told how important it is. Vaccine availability in NH changes on a daily basis. Please contact your health care provider's office to find out if your child can be immunized there.

For more information: The NH DHHS has set up a special flu "hot-line" - just call 2-1-1 (8AM - 5PM) to talk to someone. There is also a lot of reliable information on the CDC and NH DHHS websites: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu and http://www.dhhs.state.nh.us/DHHS/DHHS_SITE/swineflu.htm. Please contact your family health care provider or school nurse if you have specific questions about your own children.

Thank you for working with us to keep everyone in our schools as healthy as possible during this flu season.

Sincerely,

Superintendent of Schools