



**ORANGE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
TAYLOR EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION COMPLEX
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October 12, 2009

Dear Parent or Guardian,

We have two important updates regarding our school division's on-going effort to address the spread of the H1N1 virus, otherwise known as "swine flu."

First, the Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Health District has advised us as follows: "Based on the results we are seeing at the state laboratory, if a person has symptoms consistent with influenza, it's reasonable to assume at this point that it is novel H1N1 flu. There is little, if any, seasonal influenza circulating recently in our area." This state clarification also was referenced in an article that was published in this morning's *Fredericksburg Free Lance Star* newspaper. Given this update, we are launching a new plan for tracking and reporting flu cases in Orange County Public Schools. I'll come back to this matter later in this letter.

The second news item is the health department's confirmation that the vaccine for the H1N1 virus is forthcoming. We now expect to administer these voluntary vaccinations in our schools between October 20 and November 13. Your child's school is sending home important forms related to the vaccination program today or tomorrow. We also are posting copies of these forms on our web site. They include:

1. The Student 2009 H1N1 Influenza Vaccination Consent Form – You must complete this form and return it to your child's school no later than Monday, October 19 in order to ensure that your child will receive the vaccination; and
2. A letter which describes the vaccination program and the two different methods of administering the vaccine: flu shot and "FLUMist" nose spray. The letter includes a "preference" response sheet that you can cut out and send to your child's school with the consent form. If you do not return the "preference" response, your child will receive the vaccine by whatever method is available. The letter is accompanied by three additional information sheets. All of the sheets also are posted on our web site and they include:
 - a. "Frequently Asked Questions" about the 2009 Influenza A H1N1 Vaccine;
 - b. "What You Need to Know" about the nasal spray vaccine; and
 - c. "What You Need to Know" about the flu shot.

Now back to our new plan for tracking and reporting flu cases in Orange County Public Schools. As some of you may have read in today's *Fredericksburg* newspaper, our attendance rate for September of 2009 is only one percentage point below the same rate in September of 2008. However, like other school divisions in our region, we experienced a notable increase in absences during the final week of this September compared to the same week of September, 2008. As we reported previously, we also were observing an increase in flu-like illnesses; however, our reporting procedure required health department confirmation before we could state publicly that any given case was H1N1. To their credit, our school nurses continued to manage all flu-related illnesses as though they were the H1N1 virus. Nevertheless, the state health department's recent update now allows us to apply a tracking and reporting process that is more flexible and more accurate.

Starting Tuesday, October 20, we plan to issue a weekly report on the number of new "flu-like" illnesses that have been reported in each of our schools. The accuracy of this weekly report will depend heavily on the cooperation of parents with our school nurses and attendance clerks. If at all possible, we ask that you provide your school nurse or attendance clerk with the following information as soon as your child contracts the flu:

1. Did your child have a fever of 100 degrees or more;
2. Did your child have a persistent cough;
3. Did any other member of your family show these same symptoms; and

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4. Did your child's health care provider (doctor, physician's assistant, nurse practitioner, etc.) confirm a diagnosis of influenza?

Since the health department has authorized us to assume that all influenza cases are H1N1, it is no longer necessary for your child's case to be confirmed further. If you do not offer this information, our nurses or attendance clerks may request it. Please be patient with them when they do this. Try to remember that their intent will be to gather general information that will enable us to track the course of the virus and to respond in ways that promote the highest quality of health for all of our students. Parent cooperation will be particularly helpful at the high school since we have so many more students and since teenagers are not always as "forthcoming" with information.

We continue to take a variety of measures to curtail the spread of the flu. In addition to the usual array of good hygiene practices, students are sent home if they show a 100-degree temperature, a persistent cough or both. As much as possible, our staff is trying to screen students who return to school following a case of the flu. If they still have a fever, we may send them home again. As much as possible, we prefer for students to return to school after they have been cleared by your health care professional. In accordance with the health department's directions, we encourage all students and employees to remain at home for at least 24 hours following the break in their fever. A laser forehead thermometer is used to check all fevers at school. The list goes on. Suffice it to say that our nurses and other staff members are working very diligently to support the good health of our students.

In closing, we continue to remind all parents, students and employees about the steps recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for responding to the spread of flu. They include:

- Most people who get any form of influenza, including H1N1, recover without any treatment or special care. However, influenza can cause serious illness in some people, especially those with other health problems. Children and adults who develop a fever of at least 100°F and a cough or sore throat should call their doctor, especially if they are at higher risk of complications from influenza.
- Flu viruses spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Parents can help protect others by keeping their sick children at home or away from others until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100°F) or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications. They can also encourage the use of good cough and hand hygiene etiquette.
- Because influenza has caused illness in our school community, persons who are at higher risk of complications from influenza should consider calling their healthcare providers to discuss whether any additional precautions are advised.
- Students and staff who are well may attend school, even if others at home are sick, but they should stay at home as soon as they develop signs of illness. They should remain at home for at least 24 hours following the break in their fever.

If you have not done so already, we urge you to make plans now for childcare at home if your child becomes ill or cannot go to school for a week or longer. For information on how to care for a sick person at home and for other questions about flu, contact your health care provider or local health department; visit either of these websites: www.flu.gov or www.vdh.virginia.gov; or call 1-877-ASK-VDH3 or 1-(877) 275-8343. And remember, you can find links to these resources as well as other information related to our local efforts on our school division web site at <http://www.ocss-va.org/>.

Sincerely,



Robert P. Grimesey, Jr., Ed.D.
Superintendent