

H1N1 (Swine Flu) Virus Preparedness Update

August 2009

Dear Fulton County Parents, Staff and Community:

Although the summer months have been calm, the H1N1 (swine flu) virus is still a community health concern. We want to assure you that we are beginning the new school year proactively and stand prepared to combat and prevent the spread of this and other communicable illnesses.

Currently, there are more than 200 reported cases in Georgia and the number is expected to increase this fall and winter as we move into the flu season. The H1N1 virus has been shown to affect school-aged children more than others, and children are known to be highly likely to transmit flu viruses, especially in schools and other group settings.

The Fulton County School System continues to follow reports and recommendations issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on the H1N1 virus. Presently, the CDC and the U.S. Department of Education recommend flu vaccination programs, social distancing (keeping sick people away from healthy people) and making sure sick individuals get effective treatment. Our Student Health Services Department also is in close contact with the Fulton County Department of Health & Wellness and receives H1N1 updates frequently.

Using CDC, U.S. Department of Education and Fulton County Department of Health & Wellness recommendations and information as guides, our school system is taking the following H1N1 interventions:

Seasonal flu vaccine

While H1N1 is a concern, we are equally concerned about keeping our students and staff safe from the regular seasonal flu since it affects millions of people each year. Seasonal flu vaccinations are offered annually to school system staff, and beginning this fall, several schools will pilot seasonal flu clinics for students. Participation will be optional and more information will be shared with you if your school is part of the pilot.

H1N1 flu vaccine

Also, as you may have heard in the news, H1N1 flu vaccines may be available in the fall. If an H1N1 vaccination program is initiated, the Fulton County School System will work with the Fulton County Department of Health & Wellness to provide specific information regarding who should receive the vaccine as well as when and how the vaccine will be dispensed.

In the interim, our schools will implement and plan for non-pharmaceutical interventions to prevent illness transmission. These interventions include disinfecting commonly touched surfaces, encouraging people to wash their hands and use 'cough etiquette,' and implementing social distancing measures when necessary or recommended.

Proper hygiene and infection control

As always, prevention is our best intervention when combating the spread of any illness, whether is it the common cold or something more serious. There are everyday actions people can take to stay healthy, such as:

- Washing hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners/hand sanitizers are also effective.
- Covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- Keeping sick children (and staff members) at home until their illness has run its course and as recommended by a health care provider.
- Have your family vaccinated against the seasonal flu.

The Fulton County School System' Student Health Services Department, in collaboration with the Fulton County Department of Health & Wellness, will continue to track, monitor and follow up on reported H1N1 illnesses. If someone you know has flu-like symptoms and you suspect H1N1, please encourage them to see or contact a health care provider and to take the same steps that they would if exposed to the seasonal flu.

As a reminder, anyone experiencing a flu-like illness (fever with a cough or sore throat) should keep away from others as much as possible, stay home, and not attend school or go into the community (except to seek medical care or for other necessities) until they are fever-free for at least 24 hours and do not require medications to reduce the fever. Recovering students or staff may need to stay home for a longer period of time as directed by a health care provider.

It is acceptable for siblings and others in contact with those who have a confirmed flu virus to attend school as long as they are not actively experiencing flu-like symptoms/illness. Should they exhibit any symptoms, they will need to be excluded until the symptoms resolve or medical care is obtained.

We recognize the tremendous challenges that schools face when balancing health and safety requirements with the educational and social needs of our children. However, by working together, we can help to reduce the transmission of the seasonal flu and H1N1 in our classrooms and in our community. September is National Preparedness Month and at that time we will share more thorough information about family emergency planning and pandemic flu preparedness.

Sincerely,



Cindy Loe, Ph.D.
Superintendent

For additional information on the H1N1 virus and prevention, please visit any of these web site resources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: www.flu.gov
- Georgia Department of Community Health: www.dch.georgia.gov
- GDCH's Division of Public Health: www.health.state.ga.us
- Georgia Consumer Health Care Info: www.georgiahealthinfo.gov