



May 28, 2009

Dear Parents/Guardians of Students of the North Allegheny School District:

As we promised, we are continuing to monitor the situation we have been reporting to you regarding the Novel H1N1 virus. In conjunction with the Allegheny County Health Department, we feel it is important to provide you with the following update.

At this time, there is one confirmed case and five probable cases of H1N1 influenza at Carson Middle School. In addition, three probable cases have been diagnosed at Hosack Elementary School. These probable cases, like the confirmed case reported last week, are relatively mild cases that do not require hospitalization. The students are recovering at home without complications and will stay there until they are no longer infectious.

Specifically, these students who are ill -- and all students and faculty who have Fever  $>100$  and symptoms such as sore throat, cough, congestion, runny nose, headache or malaise -- are being asked to remain out of school for **at least 7 days** or until free of symptoms for at least 24 hours, **whichever is longer**. The District continues to monitor absentee rates at all schools and to send students who appear to have fever and/or flu symptoms home.

“Absentee rates at Carson and Hosack are somewhat elevated but not nearly high enough to warrant cancellation of classes,” said County Health Director Dr. Bruce W. Dixon.

“In fact, the higher absentee rate is a good sign because it’s an indication that parents may be heeding our advice to keep their children out of school if they have a fever and other flu-like symptoms. Keeping them at home is the right thing to do and prevents the virus from spreading.”

At this time, the Health Department continues not to recommend closing any schools in the North Allegheny School District or in any other parts of the County for one or more cases of H1N1 influenza. Instead, the focus remains on keeping sick students, faculty and staff home while they are ill in order to reduce transmission of the virus.

### **Allegheny County Health Department Assessment**

To date, all cases of Novel H1N1 flu in Allegheny County have been mild. The Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) has been conducting surveillance for weeks now and has found no cases of severe illness. At this time, ACHD does not recommend routinely closing schools for one or more positive cases of Novel H1N1 flu. Special circumstances where this recommendation may be altered include cases identified at a school where there are high risk (immuno-compromised) children, extremely high absenteeism that would otherwise make it difficult or impossible to continue classes as usual, and/or if the virulence of the Novel H1N1 changes, causing more severe illness.

The focus of current ACHD recommendations is to keep sick children and faculty/staff home while they are ill in order to reduce transmission of the virus. This is consistent with seasonal flu guidance.

### **Recommendations from the ACHD to Decrease the Spread of Novel H1N1 Flu in North Allegheny Schools**

- Each morning, all parents/caregivers should assess all family members and especially all school-age children for symptoms of influenza (fever and cough or fever and sore throat).
- Each morning, all school faculty should assess themselves for symptoms of influenza.
- Students or faculty and staff with influenza-like illness (fever and cough or fever and sore throat) should stay home and not attend school.
- Ill students and faculty/staff should not return to school for **at least 7 days** or until free of symptoms for at least 24 hours, **whichever is longer**.
- Students and staff who appear ill at arrival or become ill at school should be promptly separated from others and then sent home.

- Persons who are ill should stay home and not go into the community unless they need medical care. It is recommended that individuals call ahead to physician offices to make appointments, rather than sitting for long periods of time in a waiting room with other patients.
- Ill students should not attend alternative child care.
- Parents may use their judgment regarding the risks and benefits of sending their children to school during this influenza outbreak, as they would during a seasonal influenza outbreak.
- Frequent hand-washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers is recommended after wiping one's nose, covering a cough, using the restroom and before eating.

### **Individuals Who Should Seek Medical Attention**

To date, this has been found to be a mild illness in Allegheny County. Not all people need to be seen by a health care provider. However certain high risk groups may want to seek prompt medical attention should they become ill with flu symptoms or exposed to persons who are exhibiting flu symptoms. This high risk group includes:

- People over 65 or under 2 years of age
- People with chronic lung, heart, kidney, liver or blood disorders
- People with compromised immune systems either due to illness or medications
- Pregnant women
- People on long term aspirin therapy

Although most people with this illness do not need medical attention and should simply isolate themselves, individuals who experience the following symptoms should seek emergency medical attention immediately.

Indicators in Children that Medical Attention is Required:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Irritable, the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

Indicators in Adults that Medical Attention is Required:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

We can expect that other children and staff members may get the flu. It is important to keep in mind that this is a mild strain of the virus and that individuals we are aware of who have it are recovering at home without complications within the course of a week. We will, of course, continue to carefully monitor this situation and keep you informed. Most importantly, we are carefully following the guidance and requirements of the Allegheny County Health Department every step of the way. In some instances we are going above and beyond their suggested efforts in our response. By working together in a calm and reasonable manner, I know we can see our way through this situation and into a healthy and happy summer for all!

Sincerely,

Patricia P. Green, Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Schools