

May 6, 2009

H1N1 Influenza (Swine Flu) Information

Dear Parents,

To better track potential diseases in our students, Linn County Public Health has asked that we collect the following information when you call in to report an absence due to illness: fever, (what their temperature is), nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cough, headache, body aches, rash, or other symptoms (list) and if your child has a confirmed case of a communicable disease such as influenza, strep throat, chickenpox, etc. This reporting has been planned for some time and will continue indefinitely.

Please read the following from the Iowa Department of Public Health on important information on H1N1 (Swine flu), which also includes valuable tips on preventing other bacterial and viral infections.

This letter is to inform you that state and local public health officials have increased monitoring for illness from a novel influenza A (H1N1) virus that is making people sick in several states, including Iowa. Despite probable cases of novel influenza A (H1N1) in Iowa, we believe students can safely attend classes, thus schools should remain open at this time.

At this time, the state and local health departments have advised us that students can continue to come to school, as long as they are not sick and do not think they have flu symptoms. Flu-like symptoms include: fever (over 100 degrees F.), cough, sore throat, runny nose, or a stuffy nose. Additional symptoms may be experienced with novel influenza A (H1N1), including muscle pain, fatigue, and sometimes vomiting or diarrhea. If your child is experiencing even mild symptoms they should remain at home and avoid community or public settings. Please be aware that if your child develops symptoms while at school, you will be contacted and asked to take your child home. Our policy has always been if a child has a temperature of 100 degrees or more, they will be sent home until fever free for 24 hours.

Flu spreads easily. If you suspect your child is getting the flu, it is important that he or she remains at home and avoids a group childcare, the mall, or sporting events where other people could be exposed to flu germs. It is also important to teach your children how to reduce their risk of getting the flu and protect others from infection.

- Teach your children to wash their hands often. Washing with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds is ideal (that's about as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice).
- Teach your children the proper use of hand sanitizer. Gels, rubs, and hand wipes all work well, as long as they contain at least 60% alcohol. Hand wipes must be disposed of properly. Always read and follow label instructions when using hand sanitizer. Washing with soap and water is always best if available.
- Teach your children to keep their hands away from their face and avoid touching their mouth, nose, or eyes.
- Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of their elbow. Cough or sneeze into your sleeve not your hands!
- Help your children to learn these healthy habits by setting a good example and always doing them yourself.

If we all practice these simple prevention measures, public health officials believe we can limit the spread of the novel influenza A (H1N1) virus in our school and community. We are consulting with local health officials regarding best cleaning practices for infection control in our buildings.

While the current situation does not warrant school closure, if novel influenza A (H1N1) continues to spread and more students become ill, it may become necessary to close schools for a period of time. We are working with our local public health officials to monitor the situation in Iowa and will make all decisions in consultation with local and state officials.

If schools are closed, please do not make arrangements for childcare or sending them to a friend's home because that will put them in close contact with other children. They would need to stay home so it is important to plan ahead. We would encourage you to have a family discussion now to consider options in advance in case extra precautions are warranted by state and local officials.

You may also get information at www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/swine_flu.asp and www.cdc.gov or the 24 hour toll-free hotline at 1-800-447-1985.

**Visit the Linn County Health Department's website for frequently updated information:
www.linncounty.org**

Thank you for helping to keep our students healthy.

College Community Schools Nurses
319-848-5225