



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL
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County of Sussex

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As the 2009-2010 school year begins, the Sussex County Department of Environmental and Public Health Services understands that many parents are concerned about the 2009 H1N1 Influenza (Swine Flu) and we hope this letter will help address some of your questions. We are working closely with the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services to monitor the situation and will continue to follow the guidance established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Our goal is the overall health of our residents and we will utilize all of our resources to maintain their health and safety. We are also working closely with the County school districts to bring you the most up-to-date information as it becomes available.

At this time, CDC recommends a yearly seasonal flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting children against flu illness. You can help your family to stay healthy by protecting them against this preventable type of flu. One difference between the regular seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 Flu, is that it appears to affect young people under the age of 25 instead of the elderly, who are often at higher risk for complications from flu. Pregnant women and children are also believed to be among the highest at-risk groups for 2009 H1N1 Flu.

In addition this season, all children older than 6 months and caregivers of children younger than 6 months should receive the 2009 H1N1 vaccine when available. Although vaccination will be **voluntary**, it is recommended that New Jersey residents protect themselves and their loved ones (especially those who are most at risk) by getting vaccinated once it is available.

The illness with the new H1N1 virus has ranged from mild to severe and most have recovered without needing medical treatment, although hospitalizations and deaths from this virus have occurred. About 70% of people who have been hospitalized with this 2009 H1N1 virus have had a medical history of one or more health conditions.

People infected with seasonal and 2009 H1N1 Flu may be able to infect others for 1 day before feeling sick to 5 to 7 days after they had symptoms. This can be longer in some people, especially those with weakened immune systems and/or infected with the 2009 H1N1 virus. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

It is advised that students should not go to school when they are experiencing flu symptoms. Flu-like symptoms associated with 2009 H1N1 Influenza are similar to seasonal flu symptoms and include: fever (temp of 100°F or greater), cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Some people also may have vomiting and diarrhea, while some people may have respiratory symptoms and not have a fever.

It is important that parents recognize the signs of 2009 H1N1 early, so that they can consult with their child's health care provider. This is especially important for those children known to be at higher risk for flu-related complications due to a medical history with other health conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, suppressed immune systems, and neurologic and neuromuscular conditions.

The flu spreads easily from person to person, so if you suspect your child is getting the flu, it is important that he/she does not attend school or go anywhere else - such as group childcare, the mall, or sporting events - here other people would 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. In addition to vaccination, CDC recommends these everyday actions to prevent the spread of flu:

- *Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze.*
- *Wash your hands, with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds (that is about as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice).*
- *Hand sanitizer, with at least 60% alcohol, can be used when hands are not visibly soiled.*
- *Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.*
- *Avoid close contact with sick people.*
- *Stay home if you are sick.*
- *Families should create, review and update their family emergency plans.*

As your County health department, the Sussex County Department of Environmental and Public Health Services will work closely with school officials to assist them with decisions regarding school closings. The current situation does not warrant school closure. However, the final decision will be determined by consultation between individual school districts and the Superintendent of Schools. Parents will be informed immediately if the situation changes and it becomes necessary to close schools.

If schools are closed, please do not make arrangements—such as sending children to a friend's home or group childcare—that will put them in close contact with other children. It is important to plan ahead, have a plan in place, and consider options in advance of the event of a school closing. The CDC now recommends that anyone with flu-like illness should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines. So, if your child is sick, it is recommended that you **do not** send them to school.

For more information on 2009 H1N1 Flu, please visit the Sussex County Department of Environmental and Public Health Services website at, www.sussex.nj.us/health or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at, www.cdc.gov.

Sincerely,



Herbert Yardley, M.A., R.E.H.S.
Administrator/ Health Officer