

FLU SEASON IS HERE

If you haven't already experienced it or heard about it, the flu season is upon us. Specifically, I am referring to the fact that the H1N1 virus is now present in Adams County. It has been reported to me that we have some "lab confirmed cases" of H1N1 in our school district. I passed this information along to parents on October 9th. Since it really isn't time for our "normal" flu season to get cranked up, all cases of flu at this time are being considered as H1N1 (swine flu) whether or not they have been confirmed as such through lab testing. Lab testing per case/individual costs about \$500.00. Obviously, due to the costs involved, everyone showing symptoms of flu will not be tested for H1N1. Regardless of the number of reported lab tested cases for H1N1 in Adams County, the actual number of people infected with this virus is probably a lot higher than we think or know.

So, let's review things that we can all do to help control the spread of this virus:

1. Sneeze and/or cough into a handkerchief or tissue, and not into the open air. If you don't have a tissue, then sneeze/cough into your shirt sleeve by placing your elbow up to your face. This cuts down on germs being spread through the air and landing on other objects that could come into contact with your skin and/or body openings.
2. Use the "hands off the face" approach. Resist all temptations to touch any part of the face.
3. Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with an antibacterial soap.
4. Use hand sanitizer frequently, preferably one that has a non-alcohol base.
5. Keep some sanitary wipes handy to wipe down desktops, tabletops, railings, doorknobs, phones, computer keyboards, etc.
6. Clean restroom areas frequently and thoroughly.
7. Don't share water bottles, cups, glasses, etc.

8. Gargle twice a day with warm salt water. Simple gargling prevents proliferation.
9. Boost your natural immunity with foods that are rich in Vitamin C, such as citrus fruits.
10. Drink as much of warm liquids as you can. Drinking warm liquids has the same effect as gargling, but in the reverse direction.

Some of the above are helpful tips that we are practicing in the schools. You can easily implement these same habits at home. The truth is that these tips can be extremely helpful in controlling a number of illnesses—not just H1N1. In addition, regular flu shot vaccinations are already available. Vaccinations for H1N1 are expected this month, and may already be here. The H1N1 vaccines are going to be offered at our schools once the shipment of vaccine arrives. Parents will be notified of this in advance of the date of the vaccinations. Parents must give permission for their child to receive the vaccine before it can be administered. Contact the Adams County Health Department (544-5547) for more information on the vaccines.

If you or your child are sick, you should stay at home, especially if you have had a fever. Once your fever has subsided, you should continue to stay at home for at least 24 hours so that you don't run the risk of spreading the flu or virus. If a child becomes ill with a fever while at school, the parents will be contacted immediately to come to pick up the child.

As you know, the AC/OVSD and the Adams County Health Department determined that it would be wise to close our schools for two days—October 22nd and 23rd. This was due to so much absenteeism from seasonal flu, swine flu, strep, stomach flu, and fear. Attendance in one building had dropped as low as 76%, while the attendance rate at the Career and Technical Center had remained in the 91-92% range. Even though we have already had to close schools for illness, we will continue to work closely with officials from the Health Department throughout

the flu season to monitor this situation. Center for Disease Control officials anticipate more than one wave of the flu to hit. Let's hope that they are wrong.

In addition, the Ohio Department of Health announced recently that it has extended its H1N1 call center hours. Until further notice, the ODH H1N1 toll-free information line – 1-866-800-1404 – will be staffed from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Monday through Friday to answer questions from the public about influenza and the vaccines. Also, ODH added an H1N1 vaccine-registration component to its website at <http://www.odh.ohio.gov>.

Residents with Internet access can log-on and register to receive E-mail notifications about vaccine availability at clinics in their area. In addition to public and retail clinics listed on the ODH website, private medical providers will receive supplies of vaccines, so the public is encouraged to check with their doctor about availability. The pre-registration feature on the website will also allow you to fill out the information necessary to receive a vaccine. Those individuals who pre-register will be able to bypass the registration process when going to receive a vaccine from a clinic or medical practitioner.

ODH reminds the public that vaccine has arrived, and additional quantities will be coming to the our area in the coming weeks and months, but that H1N1 vaccinations continue to be prioritized for high-risk groups including pregnant women, people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months, all people 6 months to 24 years, and people 25 to 64 years with chronic medical conditions.

If you have any medically related questions, please contact your doctor or the Health Department. If you have a school related question regarding this article, please feel free to contact your building principal or me. Thank you.

Charles P. Kimble

Superintendent