

August 14, 2009

Dear Parents:

Many of you have heard news reports about Novel Influenza A (H1N1) (aka Swine Flu) in the U.S., in our state and in central Georgia. While we are still learning about this new virus, it has become clear that children and teens are among those most at risk of catching it. Protecting your child's health and safety are top concerns, and working as a team is the most effective approach. Therefore, we want to share information with you about swine flu, how we're responding and what you can do as well. Everyone has a role in protecting themselves, their families and their community.

Although "routine seasonal flu" is still circulating in our area, the vast majority of influenza cases in Georgia (and the rest of the U.S.) at this time are actually novel H1N1, or Swine Flu. The symptoms of swine flu are similar to regular seasonal flu and include fever, tiredness / lack of energy, lack of appetite and coughing. Some infected people have also reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Most people who get it recover at home in approximately a week, the same as with seasonal flu.

There is not yet a vaccine available for use that protects people from catching novel H1N1, though one is being developed and is currently being tested in several places around the U.S. Until a safe, effective vaccine is approved for general use, our best course of action is to take steps to prevent the spread of illness in our childcare centers and schools – not *just* swine flu, but any kind of virus. These are everyday actions you and your children can take to stay healthy:

- Do not send your child to school with a fever. Keep children with flu-like illness at home so they don't infect others.
- Sick children should not return to school or participate in any activities putting them in contact with others until their fever has been gone for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze (using your sleeve is good). If you use a tissue to cover coughs or sneezes, throw it in the trash after you use it. Teach your children to do the same.
- Avoid giving children aspirin and products that contain aspirin. Aspirin has been linked to Reyes Syndrome.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective. Be a good role model for your children.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Have your family – including your children – vaccinated against regular seasonal flu.

People who develop severe illness (high fevers lasting more than three days, difficulty breathing or other serious symptoms) should contact their local healthcare provider immediately.

At present it is NOT recommended that schools close if students or faculty develop swine flu. In this regard, your local school administration, Board of Education, health department and local Board of Health are working closely together and will keep you informed of developments as they occur.

Children are among those recommended to receive the first doses of novel H1N1 vaccines. However, rest assured that the vaccine will be given *on an entirely volunteer basis* – no one will be forced to receive it. It is very important that you stay informed. Listen and watch for announcements from your school and county health department about vaccine availability, school closings and other matters involving the pandemic as recommendations may change as the disease spreads, as we learn more about it, or if the virus changes such that it causes a more severe illness.

For more information about novel H1N1 (swine flu), contact your local county health department or go online to <http://health.state.ga.us/h1n1flu/> , www.cdc.gov or www.flu.gov. You may also contact the South Central Health District office at 478-275-6545.