

October 14, 2009

District 202 Education Partners, hello...

Last night, Dr. Harper told the Board of Education that we are seeing an increased number of students with flu-like conditions. Yesterday, we sought additional guidance from the Will County Health Dept. in terms of communications and continuing response to the situation.

Here's what Dr. Harper told the Board, based on our conversation with the Health Department:

First and foremost, this is exactly what was predicted and anticipated last spring, so we should not be surprised, and we must be careful to not overreact to media stories, rumors and false information. Increased student absenteeism is to be expected.

It is hard to say whether these cases are actually "officially confirmed" H1N1 because of various complicating factors, including the difference between state and local testing, and the onset of the "normal" flu season. In other words, "confirmed" means something different to local doctors than it does to the Health Department.

It is also hard to know if a student was exposed to the virus at school, at the store, at home or anywhere else. Just like the regular flu, H1N1 is everywhere.

Recognizing these challenges, **it is difficult, if not impossible at this time to say with any certainty how many "confirmed" cases of H1N1 there are in D. 202.**

Still, the bottom line is the same: students are experiencing "flu-like" symptoms in greater numbers -- no matter what the strain of influenza -- and we must respond to that situation to the best of our ability.

Therefore:

- Per the advice and guidance of the Will County Health Dept., we DO NOT INTEND to alert families (sending letters, Connect-EDs, etc.) about individual cases of H1N1.
- Given our size and the general spread of the virus everywhere (not exclusively our schools) we would very soon be sending letters every day, which would cause more confusion and "water down" the more important part of the message, which is to emphasize education and prevention.
- We will continue to educate families about, and encourage them to practice appropriate health etiquette to prevent the spread of H1N1.

- We will also continue to encourage families with children with fragile health conditions to seek immediate attention and guidance from their health care provider if they develop flu-like symptoms (**remember that ANY kind of flu can be serious to people with high risk conditions, not just H1N1)
- And as always, children who are otherwise healthy and develop flu-like symptoms should remain at home until they are fever free for at least 24 hours without the aid of fever reducing medicine.

We will send another letter (English and Spanish) home this week with Elementary and Middle School students. We will post the same letter on the district web site for high school families. The letter will explain our plans regarding communications and reiterate the steps families and students should take if children get sick. We will also send a Connect-ED later this week in conjunction with the letter.

***** AGAIN -- MUCH HAS CHANGED SINCE LAST SPRING AS THE MEDICAL COMMUNITY HAS LEARNED MORE ABOUT H1N1. Doctors, including those on whose guidance we are relying, are being much more conservative in their response to this issue.**

We will do our very best, with your help, to inform and serve our students and families while also recognizing the changing realities of this situation.

Thanks, as always, for your patience and support.

Tom Hernandez
Director of Community Relations