

August 31, 2009

HCPSS Prepares for H1N1 Influenza

Earlier this month, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released new guidance to help schools promote a safer environment for their students and staff and reduce exposure to influenza during the 2009-10 school year. The new guidance is designed to decrease the spread of regular seasonal flu and the new H1N1 flu while limiting the disruption of day-to-day activities and the vital learning that goes on in schools. Health officials do anticipate more illness from the new H1N1 influenza than experienced last spring and more school-based outbreaks because influenza is typically transmitted more easily in fall and winter.

In situations involving health issues, the Howard County Health Department is the lead agency. Howard County schools are following the guidance provided by health officials and taking the following steps:

- School staff will continue to encourage prevention measures the past several years will continue to be encouraged:
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water. If water is not near, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
 - Refrain from touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
 - Most importantly, if you are sick, stay home.
- Students with influenza-like symptoms (fever 100 degrees or higher, cough or sore throat) will be sent home and must remain home until they are fever free without medication for 24 hours.
- In addition to monitoring student attendance, schools are being asked by health officials to collect more information from parents about specific symptoms when absences are reported. This information will be tracked and reported to the health department. Parents are asked to contact the school on the first day their child is absent with flu-like symptoms
- Health assistants and nurses will be wearing facemasks when evaluating students staff with influenza-like illness. The CDC and the Health Department do not recommend that well students wear masks, however schools will not prohibit students from wearing masks.
- The school system is working with the Howard County Health Department to prepare for the administration of the H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available. The flu mist that is being administered in elementary schools in September vaccinates against the seasonal flu only. Staff will continue to follow CDC and Health Department guidelines for cleaning with the use of standard cleaning products and disinfectants. Health officials indicate the frequency of cleaning, within reason, is more important that the product used.

All H1N1 updates will be posted on at this site and shared with parents through HCPSS News.