

October 22, 2009

Dear Staff and Parents,

Rumors and pieces of information are beginning to circulate around the district concerning HINI flu. We are talking to the Broome County Health Department almost daily. This is what we know as of today, October 22.

According to the Center for Disease Control, flu is widespread in the nation. Flu is circulating in our community as well. The State Health Department monitors the diseases that are circulating through our area at any given time by enlisting data and limited laboratory specimens from specific, local health providers.

Novel HINI is a new subtype of influenza A flu. There are rapid tests done locally for Types A and B flu, but these tests do not determine subtypes such as Novel H1N1. Positive results on rapid tests for Type A flu may reflect the presence of HINI flu, but could also be a seasonal flu strain.

Broome County Health Department said that this is flu season and H1N1 has not been more severe than seasonal flu. Parents need to be aware and take precautions, just like any other flu season.

The regular seasonal flu shot protects against seasonal strains of the flu, but it does not protect against the HINI virus. It is important to receive both the seasonal and the H1N1 vaccines, if possible.

What is U-E doing to prevent the spread of Type A flu including HINI?

1. The district is working with the County Health Department to have **evening HINI vaccine clinics** at the high school in December. (Required second doses will be given to children under 9 at the District Office in January.) The Health Department is just starting to get small shipments of HINI vaccine. It is uncertain how much vaccine will be contained in each shipment, but we expect to have only a one week notice for a clinic once sufficient quantities of the vaccine arrives.
2. The district will use the automated, phone notification system to contact staff and parents with any time-sensitive information regarding vaccine clinics.
3. The district has installed hand-sanitizer units throughout each building.
4. We continue to incorporate more reminders of healthy habits for children and adults in school and at home:
 - Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your sleeve...not hands. Avoid touching your face, particularly eyes, nose and mouth
 - Wash hands often with warm water and soap for 20 seconds (yes, sing Happy Birthday twice).
 - Use the hand sanitizers in the cafeterias and offices.
 - People should not go to work or school if they have respiratory symptoms with fever, and stay home until they have been symptom and fever free for 24 hours without use of fever reducing medicine.
 - Clean shared space more often such as phone receivers, keyboards, steering wheels and office equipment.

Nationally known cardiothoracic surgeon and talk show host, Mehmet Oz “Dr. Oz” recently published a list of HINI prevention tips on his website. “The only portals of entry are the nostrils and mouth/throat...Gargle twice a day with warm salt water (use Listerine or Hydrogen Peroxide if you don't trust salt). H1N1 takes 2-3 days after initial infection in the throat/ nasal cavity to proliferate and show characteristic symptoms. Simple gargling prevents proliferation (spread). In a way, gargling with salt water has the same effect on a healthy individual that Tamiflu has on an infected one. Don't underestimate this simple, inexpensive and powerful preventative method.”

Dr. Oz also has recommended using nasal washes, and boosting our natural immunity with fruits and other good foods. He also suggests drinking warm drinks like tea. “Drinking warm liquids has the same effect as gargling, but in the reverse direction. They wash off proliferating viruses from the throat into the stomach where they cannot survive, proliferate or do any harm.”

The most important thing, at this point, is not to panic. We already have lots of ways to protect ourselves. I believe that it's inevitable that we will come in contact with HINI, but if we do the right things to protect ourselves, we will stay healthy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Suzanne E. McLeod". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Suzanne McLeod
Superintendent of Schools