

GALVESTON COUNTY HEALTH DISTRICT

4C's Clinics, Public Health Programs, Galveston E.M.S.

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Information for Schools Regarding H1N1 As of September 4, 2009

Every fall and winter certain illnesses such as colds and flu begin to circulate in our community. As you are probably aware this year, we also face a new flu virus challenge: novel influenza A (H1N1). Previously referred to as %swine flu,+novel H1N1 is a new strain of flu virus that spreads mainly from person-to-person through the coughing or sneezing of those infected with the virus. Some people may become infected by touching something with the flu virus on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

At this time, possible symptoms of novel H1N1 flu are similar to regular seasonal flu and include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite and coughing. Some people with novel H1N1 also experience runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Of course there are simple things we can all do to **prevent** the spread of novel H1N1 flu and other infectious illnesses:

1. **Frequent hand washing** is very important and the best way to prevent the spread of germs. Encourage children to wash their hands frequently for at least 20 seconds (about the amount of time it takes to sing %Happy Birthday twice) with soap and water. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective. Students and adults should wash their hands after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after they cough, sneeze, or blow their nose.
2. **Covering coughs and sneezes** with elbows whenever possible is also very important to control the spread of novel H1N1 flu. Germs spread when we cough or sneeze. In addition to covering their cough, children should wash their hands after coughing, sneezing, or blowing their noses. They should also properly dispose of used tissues and avoid touching their eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
3. Make sure that all students are up-to-date with their immunizations and get a **seasonal flu shot** when they become available.
4. **If children or sick and/or have a fever, please keep them at home and limit their contact with others to keep them from spreading novel H1N1 flu.** The majority of those with novel H1N1 so far have recovered without seeking medical care, but if children develop what appears to be serious symptoms, parents

should contact their doctor/healthcare provider for further guidance. **At the current time public health recommendations say it is safe for a student to return to school once they have been fever free for 24 hours without having taken any fever reducing medicine.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that since many are recovering without seeing a doctor it is not necessary that schools require a note from a doctor for return to school, because doctors will be very busy taking care of people that may have more serious influenza illness. However, check with your school for their policies.

Some good news is that at the current time, the severity of novel H1N1 influenza does not appear to be any more significant than the regular seasonal flu. It is also good news that a vaccine to protect against novel H1N1 influenza is expected to be released later in the fall. As it becomes available information on availability, and high risk targeted groups to receive it will be publicly disseminated. In the meantime, follow the preventive measures outlined above (1-4).

Please understand this is an evolving situation. Additional information regarding novel H1N1 flu virus is expected as local, state and federal health officials continue to develop response plans to this new illness. For updated information on H1N1 access www.gchd.org; www.Texasflu.org; or www.flu.gov.