



School District 59 (Peace River South)

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From the Superintendent (CEO)

NEWSLETTER

H1N1 Influenza Update:

Based on the number of phone calls to the Board Office and to the school principals, it is time to update parents on the H1N1 influenza situation in our schools.

As of Wednesday, October 26th, almost all of our schools have reported that students are absent due to flu like symptoms. Through the use of throat swabs of sick students, H1N1 has been confirmed as the cause of student absentees in a number of schools.

The Superintendent will continue to work closely and directly with Public Health, the Regional Health Officer, and the Provincial Health Officer where schools are particularly impacted by staff and student absentees due to illness. The ongoing monitoring of student and staff wellness is important should a school reach the point that, for safety reasons, school closure may be contemplated.

Everyone has a burden of responsibility in minimizing their exposure to H1N1 influenza, and in minimizing the exposure of others. Following are the main steps for prevention:

1. Stay home when you are sick or have influenza symptoms. Get plenty of rest and check with a health care provider as needed. Phone ahead to notify your health care provider of your situation before showing up at their place of practice.
2. Avoid close contact with people who are sick. If you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick (minimum 2 metres).
3. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, and throw the tissue away immediately. At the minimum where a tissue is not available, cough into the crook of your arm.
4. Wash your hands often, because it will help protect you from getting sick. Use wipes or gel hand sanitizers where soap and water are not available.
5. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. That is how you can introduce the virus to your body.
6. Practice good health habits that will strengthen your immune system. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious foods. Smoking increases the risk of serious consequences if you contract the flu.

We do not recommend that students stay home from school unless they are sick. It's important to continue on our daily lives. There is no sense in avoiding school thinking that H1N1 is being avoided, because H1N1 is in the community. Students could just as easily pick up H1N1 in the supermarket, from a family member, or at Sunday church. It is also important to remember that the vast majority of people who contract H1N1 are living through the symptoms with some mild to moderate discomfort, and returning to their regular routines after 5-7 days.

H1N1 is typically contracted in a few common ways:

- Shaking hands with an infected person or touching a surface contaminated with the virus, followed by touching one's eyes, nose or mouth;
- Infectious droplets from a coughing or sneezing person landing in the eye or onto the moist inner surface of the mouth;
- Breathing infectious airborne droplets or particles from the coughing or sneezing of infected persons.
- Sharing food (e.g. bags of chips) or utensils (including cell phones, make up etc...), with an infected person. This includes sharing from trays of food where hands come into direct contact with the food. Keep this in mind over Halloween as food and treats are prepared.

All school-based staff has received a plan to reduce the exposure of students and staff to H1N1. The washing of hands and disinfecting of surfaces will be a primary practice in all schools this winter. Every school is committed to working its way through the H1N1 season in a way that will better train us for future influenzas, and support student and staff health as much as possible. School activities such as assemblies, dances or extended field trips may be cancelled if H1N1 is particularly active in the school prior to the event. Should the flu severely tax the availability of staff, or the operation of the transportation department, parents will be informed of changes to routines through media outlets and our website at www.sd59.bc.ca.

Immunization clinics are planned for each community, and Public Health is currently establishing when they will occur. You can get the latest information on these clinics by going online to www.northernhealth.ca and clicking on the *H1N1 Vaccination Clinics* button.