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September 15, 2009

Update on the H1N1 Flu Virus in our School Community

To the Parents and Guardians of Children in Moscow School District 281:

As of today, September 15, 2009, we are seeing moderate flu like activity in our local community thus affecting our schools. As I wrote in my first mailing, we ask you as a parent to take charge of your child when it comes to him/her being sick. If your child is suffering from flu illness they need to stay home. The classic symptoms that I have been seeing are high fever, headache, severe body aches, and some respiratory symptoms such as sore throat, congestion, cough, and stuffy nose. Although nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea are seen less frequently with this illness, it can be present secondary to a high fever.

In my observation the past week and a half these are some of my concerns. Children are coming to school with fevers. Children and staff are coming back to school too soon and rebounding back in to illness. This is not a short lived illness. It is not unusual for a child/adult to miss a full week of school/work and still it taking another week to feel back to normal. I understand the strain of missing work, missing school, and the stress that goes along with that, but we must get completely well before we return to our normal activities. You must be free of a fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications.

I have seen a terrific effort by all Moscow School District staff to combat germs as best as we can. Thank you to the many of you who have sent Kleenex, and other items to help keep the spread of the virus at a minimum.

When taking care of yourself, your sick child, or other family member, please remember the importance of keeping hydrated. With a high fever, dehydration is the number one concern. Other than the importance of hydration, comfort, and observation for secondary infection (strep throat, bronchitis, pneumonia), time and patience are the best medicine. Usually what we see with the typical flu scenario is aches, headache, followed by fever. Often sore throat and/or cough come next. The fever can last up to a week, with it going up and down throughout the day. It is not uncommon for there to be no fever through the morning hours but as the day goes on into afternoon and evening there is often a spike in temperature is seen. Rebound has also been common with this illness. There might be a couple days of fever and aches followed by feeling much better. You think you are ready to return to normal activity and you are down again. This is why I stress the importance of letting the virus run its course before resuming normal activity.

As far as going to the doctor, this is my recommendation. If you go to the doctor with early symptoms there is not a lot they can do for you. There is the use of antivirals that have the best results in the first two days of illness, but this is something that I recommend you discuss with your doctor before hand. Antivirals are not given to everyone that is seen and suspects that they have the flu. High risk individuals and individuals with immuno-suppression will be at the top of the list. If after four to five days of symptoms along with a sore throat or cough that is not resolving, a doctors appointment might be necessary. This is a decision that is totally up to each parent or guardian and must be made according to each person's comfort level. Of course, if there is ever any severe respiratory distress I recommend medical care immediately.

The latest information I have about vaccine is as follows. The annual flu shot is now available at many locations. Please check with your personal care provider with any concerns or questions you might have. The H1N1 vaccine is still in the production process. The latest news from Center for Disease Control is it will be available between the beginning and mid-part of October. Please continue to get the most up-to-date information from the Web site www.cdc.gov or the Moscow School District Web site www.ms281.org.

I again stress the importance of staying home if you are sick! This is our number one combatant against spreading this virus. Please work with us to make this school year not only healthy but successful for all.

Thank you,
Beth Papineau, RN
Moscow School District Nurse
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