

David Carriger
USD 493 Columbus
Superintendent of Schools

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Dear Parents, Guardians, Teachers, Staff and Community Members:

The Columbus USD 493 School System has been notified that we have several confirmed cases of Influenza A Flu.

If your child tests positive for the Influenza A virus you may not be able to find out definitively what flu virus they have. Currently available rapid influenza diagnostic tests cannot distinguish between 2009 H1N1 and seasonal influenza A viruses. Most people with flu symptoms this season will not require testing for 2009 H1N1 because the test results usually do not change how you are treated. As of September 2009, more than 99% of circulating influenza viruses in the United States are 2009 H1N1. Therefore, at this time, if your health care provider determines that you have the flu, you most likely have 2009 H1N1.

Symptoms of the novel H1N1 flu are very similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. In some cases people are reporting diarrhea and vomiting. Fortunately, the illness caused by this virus tends to be mild and typically lasts for only a few days.

As we continue to deal with this variation of Influenza A and as the flu season begins, it is very important for students, parents, teachers, staff and community members not to panic and instead make themselves as informed as possible about the novel H1N1 flu. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the federal government all have very good websites where an abundance of information can be found. The KDHE website has an especially good link to frequently asked questions that you might find helpful.

The addresses to those websites are as follows:

- KDHE – <http://www.kdheks.gov/H1N1/index.htm>
- CDC – http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general_info.htm
- Pandemic Flu – <http://www.flu.gov>

We are working closely with the Cherokee County Health Department and will continue to communicate reliable information to you as it becomes available. It is also important to understand that your school district is taking precautionary and proactive steps to help minimize the spread of the flu. These measures include but are not limited to the following:

- Instructing students on proper hygiene and hand washing procedures

- Encouraging frequent use of hand sanitizers
- Sending home students with flu-like symptoms
- Isolating students who are ill and need to go home until they are picked up by their parents
- Encouraging students to cough or sneeze into the bend of the elbow or a tissue
- Frequent cleaning of hard surfaces; such as desks, tables, keyboards, water fountains, restroom fixtures,
- Monitoring daily attendance rates.

Fortunately, illness from this virus is usually mild and only lasts a few days, although in some cases severe disease and death can result. So far, most cases have occurred in children and young adults and some of those have needed hospitalization.

Schools can be easy places for flu viruses to spread. State and local public health officials are working closely with your school district now to take steps that will limit the spread of the pandemic virus.

Here is what your school needs you, and all parents, to do:

Keep children who are sick at home. Don't send them to school or take them anywhere else, except to receive needed medical care. Ill children should stay home until they are fever free (without the use of fever-reducing medicine like Tylenol or Ibuprofen) for 24 hours or more. This has increased from 24 hours originally.

Plan for the possibility that you will be called to bring your child home from school if he or she gets sick while in school.

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, and insist that your children do the same. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the bend of your elbow.

If you have further questions, please contact the school, or the Cherokee County Health Department at 620-429-3087.

Sincerely,

David Carriger
Superintendent
USD 493 Columbus