

H1N1: Information for parents, students and staff.

Wake County Public School System works closely with Wake County Human Services on any cases of communicable diseases or viruses. WCPSS and Wake County Human Services are carefully monitoring the situation and will keep parents and the public updated. With Year-round schools in session and with the start of Traditional schools on Tuesday, Aug. 25, taking simple steps to protect your health are very important.

As with any virus, cold or other illness, students and staff with cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, fever or feverishness, tiredness, body aches, headache, chills, diarrhea and vomiting should stay home from school/work until they have recovered.

- **CDC recommends that people with influenza-like illness remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100° F [37.8°C]), or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications.**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) H1N1 (Swine Flu) Web site, <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu>, is updated frequently and is the best source for general information. Information can also be found by contacting the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services CARE-LINE at 919-855-4400 (English/Spanish)
Additional WCPSS Information: <http://www.wcpss.net/swineflu>

Simple Steps you can take to protect your health:

- Stay home from school or work if you are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash hands with soap and water frequently or use alcohol-base hand cleaners if soap and water are not available.
- Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth.

Tips for parents on talking to children about H1N1:

The following information was provided by the National Association of School Nurses.

Concern over H1N1 can make children and parents anxious. There is still uncertainty about how far and quickly the virus will spread during the fall and winter flu season.

Acknowledging some level of concern, without panicking, is appropriate and can result in people taking actions that reduce the risk of illness. Helping children cope with anxiety regarding the flu requires providing prevention information without causing alarm.

Children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. If parents seem overly worried, children may panic. Parents should reassure their children that health and school officials are working hard to ensure that people throughout the country stay healthy. However, children also need factual, age-appropriate information about the potential seriousness of disease risk and concrete instruction about how to avoid infection and spread of the virus. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.

Remain calm and reassuring. Your children will react to and follow your verbal and nonverbal reactions. What you say and do about the flu virus and current prevention efforts can either increase or decrease your child's anxiety. If true, emphasize to your children that they and your family are fine. Remind them that you and the adults at their school are there to keep them safe and healthy. Let your children talk about their feelings and help put their concerns into the appropriate perspective.

Make yourself available. Your children may need extra attention from you and may want to talk about their concerns and questions. Make time for them. Tell them you love them and give them plenty of hugs and kisses.

Know the symptoms of H1N1 and how it spreads. Symptoms of H1N1 include fever, sore throat and cough. Some people also have a runny nose, fatigue, body aches, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. The virus is transmitted through the coughing or sneezing of people infected with the virus. People may also become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouths or noses. The virus is not spread by eating pork or other foods.

Review basic hygiene practices. Encourage children to practice everyday good hygiene by washing their hands, by covering their mouths with a tissue when they sneeze or cough, and by not sharing food or drinks. These simple steps are very effective at preventing the spread of flu and other illnesses. Giving children guidance on what they can do to prevent infection gives them a greater sense of control over the flu and will help to reduce their anxiety.

Be honest and accurate. In the absence of factual information, children often imagine situations far worse than reality. Don't ignore their concerns, but rather explain that at the present moment the vast majority of people, even those who are sick, will be okay. Nationwide, the number of people who are currently sick is very small. Children can be told that there are many ways to avoid the virus and how doctors can help to treat people who do get sick. Contact your pediatrician and/or refer them to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for factual information.

Avoid excessive blaming. When tensions are high, some people exert excessive energy trying to assign blame. It is important to avoid stereotyping any one group of people as responsible for the virus. Bullying or negative comments made toward another ethnic group should be stopped and reported to the school.

Monitor television viewing. Limit television viewing or access to information on the Internet. Constantly watching updates on the status of the flu virus can increase anxiety. Engage your child in games or other activities instead. Developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.

Maintain a normal routine to the extent possible. Keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring and promotes physical health. Ensure that children get plenty of sleep, regular meals, and exercise. Encourage them to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities, but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.

Keep Explanations Age Appropriate

Early elementary school children need brief, simple information that should balance H1N1 facts with appropriate reassurances that their schools and homes are safe and that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Give simple examples of the steps people take every day to stop germs, such as washing hands.

Upper elementary and early middle school children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what will happen if H1N1 comes to their school or community. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy. Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to prevent germs from spreading.

Upper middle school and high school students are able to discuss the issue in a more in-depth (adult-like) way and can be referred directly to appropriate sources of H1N1 facts (e.g., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of H1N1. Having such knowledge can help them feel a sense of control.