

Charles Weis, Ph.D.
County Superintendent of Schools

July 22, 2009

Dear District Superintendent,

As we prepare for school this fall, we wanted to take a moment to provide you with updated information about the pandemic H1N1 flu virus, as well as share ideas about conducting a H1N1 educational campaign on high school campuses.

As you may know, the H1N1 flu virus has continued to circulate throughout our community. There has been an increase in flu activity reported over the summer months, which is rare for this time of year. Since the Public Health Department is now only testing the sickest of patients who have been hospitalized, the number of pandemic H1N1 cases being reported underestimates the total number of cases in our community.

The median age of people with H1N1 continues to be about 17 years of age, with the largest number of confirmed and probable cases in people between the ages of five and 24. At this time, there are few cases reported in people older than 64 years of age. Both of these facts differ in comparison to those usually ill from seasonal flu.

Since this is a new flu virus for which the population has little or no immunity, scientists and health professionals remain concerned that, as the virus continues to pass through populations, it could mutate and cause more severe illness and deaths. Even if this does not happen, the anticipated large numbers of infected people could potentially overwhelm community resources.

Because the pandemic H1N1 is striking our school-age population, the Santa Clara County Public Health Department would like to work with all school districts to launch a H1N1 education campaign. Because high school students get information in different ways, and often independently from their parents, this campaign will focus on them. Other information and tools will be made available for the parents of all school-age children and the Santa Clara County community at-large.

The high school campaign will be about what students themselves can do to prevent getting the flu and limiting the spread. The goal of the campaign is to reinforce good health hygiene and/or change certain behaviors among students. The campaign will include the use of social media, Web components and other tools, including a YouTube video contest in which students will be encouraged to develop their own flu prevention messages. Winners will have their videos posted on the Public Health Department's Web site and they will be invited to participate in a news conference.

County Board of Education

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Public Health will provide a campaign toolbox to each high school. Each tool box will include materials and information to be used by students to run their own peer-to-peer campaign this fall. Employees of the Public Health Department will also be available to meet with a group at each high school to discuss the campaign and answer questions.

The Public Health Department will send a letter similar to this one to each high school principal and then mail the campaign toolbox out in August. If you have any ideas, suggestions or concerns about this project, please let us know. You can also contact the Public Health Department staff working on this project at (408) 885-7515.

It is important for all of us to do all that we can to protect our own health and the health of our students and staff. Educational campaigns such as these can help high school campuses get more involved in limiting the spread of disease.

Finally, a little about the development of a H1N1 vaccine. If the trials for this new vaccine go well, the first shipment is likely to be sent to Public Health Departments in late October. The current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention plan is to send additional shipments as more vaccine is produced. What this means is that there will not be enough in any one shipment to vaccinate the entire community. The Public Health Department will provide guidelines to the medical community along with our vaccine distribution plan. Watch for more information about this in the near future.

Thank you for your assistance in our efforts to limit the spread of disease and to protect the health of campuses and community.

Sincerely,



Dr. Charles Weis, County Superintendent of Schools



Marty Fenstersheib, MD, MPH, Health Officer for Santa Clara County