



## KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

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September 1, 2009

Dear Parent/Guardian/Staff/Community Member:

Last May, pandemic H1N1 influenza (formerly called swine flu) was first identified in Alaska. Since then, limited, but ongoing transmission, primarily among school-age children, teenagers, and young adults has continued to occur. With the recent start of school, it is likely that this virus will continue to spread. This information is being shared in the hopes that it may help you to protect yourself, your children, and others from influenza.

Symptoms of H1N1 influenza are similar to those of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue, as well as some reports of diarrhea and vomiting. Most cases in Alaska have been mild, similar to those seen with seasonal influenza. However, as with seasonal flu, severe illnesses and death have occurred. The risk of serious illness appears to be greatest for infants and young children, pregnant women, and persons with underlying health problems. If your child currently has or develops symptoms of influenza, please notify your health care provider. In some cases treatment with an antiviral prescription medication may be recommended.

Influenza viruses spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people sick with influenza. People may also become infected by handling something with flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or face. Three simple measures can greatly help prevent the spread of influenza as well as many other germs.

- Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Stay home if you are sick or beginning to feel sick! You are contagious for up to 24 hours before you really notice you are ill!

To reduce transmission of H1N1 virus in schools and community, it is imperative that students, faculty or staff with influenza-like illness (fever with a cough or sore throat or other flu like symptoms) should stay home. Ill persons should NOT attend school, after-school activities, or go into the community except to seek medical care until they are feeling better and **without fever for at least 24 hours without use of fever reducing medication**. Students, staff or community members who appear to have an influenza-like illness on arrival at school or who become ill during the school day will be promptly separated from others and sent home.

At this time, school closure for pandemic H1N1 influenza is not recommended unless the magnitude of faculty or student absenteeism interferes with the school's ability to function.

Finally, vaccination is another important measure to prevent influenza. Pandemic *H1N1 influenza* vaccines are currently in production and should be available for Alaskans this fall. Vaccination will be strongly encouraged for school-aged children and teenagers, among others. Vaccination against *seasonal influenza* is also recommended this fall for all children ages 6 months to 18 years and is currently available through your local health care provider.

If you have questions or concerns regarding these recommendations, please contact Kenai Public Health at 335-3400, Homer Public Health at 235-8857, Seward Public Health at 224-5567, your child's school nurse, or KPBSD's Health Services Coordinator at 283-2190 or [nwalsworth@kpbsd.k12.ak.us](mailto:nwalsworth@kpbsd.k12.ak.us).