

September 2, 2009

Dear Parent or Student Guardian,

Over 71,000 thousand children in Sonoma County have started back to school. School officials and the County of Sonoma Department of Health Services are providing information to families about what they can do to help prevent the spread of flu. As you know, the flu is in our community and can be easily spread from person to person. Therefore, we are taking steps to reduce the spread of flu in all Sonoma County schools. We want to keep the school open to students and functioning in a normal manner during this flu season. **But, we need your help to do this.**

We expect to see increased cases of flu this year. Vaccines will be available to help reduce the number of people who become ill with the flu, but not until later this fall. For now we are doing everything we can to keep our schools functioning as usual. Here are a few things you can do to help.

- **Teach your children to wash their hands** often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. You can set a good example by doing this yourself.
- **Teach your children not to share personal items** like drinks, food or unwashed utensils, and to cover their coughs and sneezes with tissues. Covering up their coughs or sneezes using the elbow, arm or sleeve instead of the hand when a tissue is unavailable.
- **Know the signs and symptoms of the flu.** Symptoms of the flu include fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit, 37.8 degrees Celsius or greater), cough, sore throat, a runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, and feeling very tired. Some people may also vomit or have diarrhea. Children or family members at high risk for complications of the flu, such as pregnant women, those with asthma, diabetes, compromised immune systems or neuromuscular diseases should call their health care provider as soon as possible if they become sick to determine if treatment is needed.
- **Do not send children to school if they are sick.** Any children who are determined to be sick while at school *will be sent home.*
- **Keep sick children at home** for at least 24 hours *after* they no longer have fever or do not have signs of fever, without using fever-reducing drugs. Keeping children with a fever at home will reduce the number of people who may get infected.
- **Vaccinate your child** for both the seasonal flu and H1N1 2009 flu when the vaccine becomes available.

**If the flu becomes more severe in your school or around the County,** we may take additional steps to prevent the spread such as:

- Conducting active fever and flu symptom screening of students and staff as they arrive at school,
- Making changes such as postponing class trips.
- Increasing the dismissal period for students and staff from school to at least 7 days if they become sick.
- Closing schools if the situation becomes serious enough that the Public Health Officer directs such action.

For more information, about the flu go to the Sonoma County Public Health website at [www.sonoma-county.org/H1N1](http://www.sonoma-county.org/H1N1) or call the Public Health Information Line at (707) 565-4477. Information about the flu is also available at [www.CDC.gov/H1N1](http://www.CDC.gov/H1N1) and [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov).

We will notify you of any additional changes to our school's strategy to prevent the spread of flu.

Sincerely,