



"Dedicated to developing life-long learners prepared to succeed in an ever changing world"

Independent School District 317 Deer River Public Schools

Matt Grose, Superintendent – ext. 212 ♦ mgrose@deerriver.k12.mn.us

Carol Risberg, Business Manager – ext. 207 ♦ crisberg@deerriver.k12.mn.us

Mark Curtiss, Technology Coordinator – ext. 235 ♦ mcurtiss@deerriver.k12.mn.us

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Dear Parent or Guardian,

As you know, flu season is here and most people I have talked to either have had a sick person in their family or know someone who has. In addition to the regular seasonal flu that affects communities, the H1N1 strand of the flu is making this flu season even more challenging. This letter is intended to do three things: provide you with more information about the flu, alert you to what Deer River Schools are doing about the flu, and provide you with some information regarding dealing with the flu.

At the time of this writing of this letter, I am unaware of any confirmed cases of the H1N1 strand in our district. Local clinics are following the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) guidelines, testing only those who end up hospitalized with severe symptoms. With that said, the likelihood that the H1N1 strand is in our schools, community, region, and state is very high, as MDH has stated that the flu that is going around the State of Minnesota right now appears to be the H1N1 flu (not the regular seasonal flu). Since there is no treatment for influenza except to rest at home, drink plenty of fluids, and take Tylenol or Ibuprofen for discomfort and fever, we have been advised that clinics do not want to see people with influenza-like illness unless they are severely ill. Doctors might treat people who are at high risk of influenza complications (pregnant women, medically fragile, diabetics, etc) with Tamiflu, a drug that reduces the time required to recover from the flu. This treatment is generally only effective if taken within the first two days of feeling sick. In addition, the H1N1 test results take several days, during which time the patient usually begins to recover.

The H1N1 flu, like the seasonal flu, can be easily spread from person to person. Therefore, we are taking steps to reduce the spread of flu in our schools, reminding students and staff about the importance of covering coughs and sneezes, providing access to facilities and encouraging frequent hand-washing, making alcohol-based cleaners available, sending sick students and staff home, and cleaning surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact. We are also halting the requirement in our attendance policy that states that a student needs a doctor's note to be excused ill from school to take pressure off our or local health care system.

If the flu outbreak becomes more severe, 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 to increase the space between people at school, and dismissing students from school for longer periods of time if they become sick. The Center for Disease Control may recommend dismissing school based on information that the outbreak is becoming more severe and in most cases only if the dismissal will influence how severely the flu is effecting people, not simply based on how many people have the flu. A decision to dismiss school needs to balance the goal of reducing the number of people who become seriously ill from influenza with the goal of minimizing social

District Office

101 1st Avenue NE - P.O. Box 307 ♦ Deer River, MN 56636 ♦ 218.246.2420 ♦ 218.246.8948 (Fax)

disruption and safety risks to children sometimes associated with school dismissal, especially considering that the duration of a dismissal is recommended to be five to seven days in order to be effective. Based on the experience and knowledge gained in areas that had large outbreaks in spring 2009, the potential benefits of dismissing students from school are often outweighed by negative consequences, including students being left home alone, health workers missing shifts when they must stay home with their children, students missing meals, and interruption of students' education. Our goal is to keep our schools open to students and functioning in a normal manner during this flu season. **We need your help to do this.**

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. Coughs and sneezes should be covered up 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 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.
- **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.
- **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.

Other recommendations for parents from the Center for Disease Control:

- **Plan for child care at home** if your child gets sick or their school is dismissed (for a minimum of 5 school days).
- **Plan to monitor the health of the sick child** and any other children by checking for fever and other symptoms of flu.
- **Update emergency contact lists.**
- **Identify a separate room in the house for care of sick family members.** Consider designating a single person as the main caregiver for anyone who gets sick.
- **Pull together games, books, DVDs and other items** to keep your family entertained while at home.

District staff are working closely with the local, county, and state health agencies to monitor flu conditions and make decisions about the best steps to take concerning our schools. We will keep you updated with new information as it becomes available. More information and links are available on our school district website at www.isd317.org

Sincerely,

Matt Grose
Superintendent for Deer River Public Schools