



ARLINGTON CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

The weather has gotten colder and we are starting to spend more time closed up in our houses with the heat on. "Tis the season for colds and flu!" And of course, this year, we are dealing with the added concerns of the novel H1N1 influenza virus (also known as the "Swine Flu") being among the germs that are out there waiting to take advantage of us.

We have just begun to see the first cases of influenza and influenza-like-illness (ILI) in schools across our district. Though at this time these numbers are still low, I wanted to take this opportunity to update everyone on our current situation and to remind everyone of the steps they should be taking to prevent the spread of all communicable diseases, including colds, seasonal flu, and the novel H1N1 influenza virus.

At this point, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is reporting that most influenza that has been identified is caused by the H1N1 virus. However, most people who go to their physician's office or to the emergency room are not being tested, since treatment is the same for both types of flu. Seasonal influenza and novel H1N1 influenza present with very similar symptoms, which typically include: fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit), cough, sore throat, a runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, and feeling very tired. Some people (especially children) may also vomit or have diarrhea. Anyone exhibiting fever and/or any of the other symptoms **must** stay home until they are 24 hours fever and symptom – free without the use of medication.

We continue to work closely with the Dutchess County Department of Health (DCDOH) to monitor flu conditions, and we receive updates at least weekly from the Department of Health and the CDC. Currently, the school nurses are shifting their method of completing the Department of Health mandated flu surveillance from a weekly model to a daily update. This will allow the Department of Health to see trends of illness more quickly. School nurses may call the parents of children who are absent to find out what their symptoms are to assist in this surveillance, but we also encourage parents to call their school nurse to report their child's illness. This will also facilitate your child being able to get missed work promptly.

In our schools, the importance of hand washing and respiratory etiquette continues to be a focus with students. New hand washing posters are being posted in all student bathrooms. We also continue to focus on cleaning surfaces that have frequent hand contact. Though the Arlington School District has offered to hold H1N1 influenza vaccination clinics that would be run by the Dutchess County Department of Health, clinics have not yet been scheduled. We will update you if this occurs.

We continue to need your assistance to help prevent the flu from spreading. It passes easily from person to person, which is why it is so important for sick people to stay home. Here is a reminder of a few other things that you can do to help:

- **Remind your children to frequently wash their hands** for 20 seconds with soap and water (sing Happy Birthday twice) or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer which contains at least 60% alcohol. (Reminder: You are welcome to send hand sanitizer and tissues to school with your children to keep in their desk or backpack.)
- **Instruct your children not to share personal items** like drinks, food or unwashed utensils. It is particularly important to remind a child who plays on a sports team where sharing water bottles are common. Water bottles should be clearly marked with your child's name.
- **Review proper respiratory etiquette.** Remind your children to cover their coughs and sneezes with tissues, or their elbow when a tissue is not available. Tissues should be discarded and hands should be washed **immediately** after using tissues.
- **Know the signs and symptoms of the flu** listed above, and monitor your child for them **daily**.
- **Please make sure your emergency contact information is updated.**
- **Speak with your student's health care provider about whether your child should get the seasonal and H1N1 influenza vaccines.** The CDC recommends that everyone should get the seasonal flu vaccine; recommendations for groups who should get the H1N1 influenza vaccine include any child between the ages of 6 months and 24 years. Information on the H1N1 influenza vaccine can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-inact-h1n1.pdf>
- **Do not send your children to school if you think they may be sick. Any children who are determined to be sick while at school will be sent home! Any child who has been ill and who returns to school prior to being fever and symptom – free for 24 hours will also be sent home!**

We continue to strive to provide a safe and healthy educational environment for our students, and we appreciate your help in our efforts. For more information about the flu, visit www.flu.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO. We will continue to post updated information on our website at www.arlingtonschools.org.

Sincerely,



Doreen Bischof, RN, NCSN
District Health & Safety Supervisor