

COUNTY OF MORRIS
DEPARTMENT OF LAW & PUBLIC SAFETY
OFFICE OF HEALTH MANAGEMENT

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UPDATE ON H1N1 INFLUENZA

June 2, 2009

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Over the last month the Morris County Office of Health Management and your local Health Department have been monitoring the current H1N1 Influenza A (Swine Flu) outbreak. As of June 2 the NJ Department of Health has confirmed 20 cases of H1N1 Influenza A in Morris County and 78 cases in New Jersey. Cases have been confirmed in 15 of New Jersey's 21 counties. Based on the information available we now believe that we can confirm community wide spread of H1N1 Influenza A in Morris County.

Because it is easy to collect data on absenteeism, schools have played an important role in helping public health officials monitor the spread of H1N1 Influenza A in New Jersey. As such, a number of the cases in Morris County, as in other counties have been associated with schools. Now that we have confirmed a community wide spread of the virus we will be suspending our sampling program. We will no longer need to test for H1N1 Influenza A in Morris County. However, local health departments and schools will continue to monitor for influenza like illness (fever with cough and/or sore throat).

The Morris County Office of Health Management along with our municipal health officers continue to advise that schools do not need to close if cases of H1N1 Influenza A are identified in a school. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the NJ Department of Health have stated that in general, closing schools for cases of H1N1 Influenza A is no longer effective as the virus spreads through the community. **The mild nature of the disease suggests it should be treated as we would treat any other influenza.**

Flu spreads easily from person to person and this being a new strain of flu, people do not have immunity. While the total number of confirmed cases of H1N1 Influenza A has remained small we are seeing an increase in influenza like illness throughout the community. In order to reduce the spread of influenza in your school and community the Morris County Office of Health Management and your local health department have advised your school administration to exclude students and staff with influenza-like symptoms (fever with cough and/or sore throat) from school for 7 days after illness onset, or 24 hours after all symptoms disappear, whichever is longer. As a parent, you can help prevent the spread of influenza by keeping your child **at home for the 7 days** and not have them participate in group activities. When you report an absence to your school please be prepared to state the reason and any symptoms your child has.

If your child's doctor is diagnosing something other than influenza, please have the doctor include the diagnosis in any note requesting the child return to school earlier than 7 days. If the doctor can not make a conclusive diagnosis, they may note that they have ruled out influenza. Should your doctor have any questions, they may contact your local health department for more information.

While the symptoms of H1N1 Influenza A have been mild in most people, because there is no vaccine the CDC advises that people who would have serious complications if they got the flu, to consider their risk before attending public gatherings where H1N1 Influenza A is circulating. Anyone who would be at high risk of complications if they got the flu (ex: people with chronic medical conditions, person's 65 and older, pregnant women) should consult their doctor if they are concerned.

Good hygiene practice both at home and school will help reduce the risk of infection:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze; put the used tissue in a waste basket and clean your hands.
- Cover your mouth and nose with your upper sleeve (not your hands) if you do not have a tissue and need to cough or sneeze.
- Clean your hands as soon as possible after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
 - Use soap and water and wash your hands for 15 - 20 seconds; or
 - Use alcohol-based hand wipes or alcohol-based (60-95% alcohol) gel hand sanitizers; rub these on the hands until the liquid or gel dries.

You are welcome to visit our Morris County Health Office website at www.morrishealth.org for more information. Should you have any additional questions we encourage you to contact your local Municipal Health Officer.

You may be confident that your School Administration and local Health Department are working in unison with Morris County officials to minimize the risk to you and your children.

Sincerely,
Peter Summers
Peter Summers
Morris County Health Officer