

Weston Public Schools H1N1 Flu Update – September 8, 2009

Dear Parents/Guardians:

As we begin a new school year it's important to update you regarding the expected outbreak of H1N1 virus. Over the summer, the Connecticut Departments of Public Health and Education have been working closely with school administrators, school medical directors and local health directors to reinforce preparations in the event of an outbreak in our schools. This is particularly timely given last spring's emergence of the novel H1N1 (swine) flu virus.

The H1N1 virus has been shown to affect school-aged children disproportionately, and children are known to be highly likely to transmit flu viruses, especially in school and other group settings. It is critical, therefore, for individuals, families and the entire school community to use simple preventative measures to slow disease transmission. It is also important that we focus attention on how we can work together in partnership this year to assure that the risk of exposure to students, staff and families is minimized.

As part of our preparations for the upcoming school year this letter is being sent to you to communicate how we intend to respond in the event of a return of the H1N1 Flu this fall as predicted by most experts in the field.

How and when we will communicate with you:

The most up-to-date information will *always* be posted on the Weston Public Schools website www.westonk12-ct.org. We will use our mass phone call system (AlertNow) to contact you only in the following instances:

- A significant change in Centers for Disease Control (CDC) or Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) protocols
- A significant change in our situation, such as the need to close school(s)

All other information regarding H1N1 Flu will be posted on our website, so please check it frequently for updates. We ask you to please check the website before contacting us by phone or email. Last spring the school offices and the Superintendent's office received many phone calls requesting information that was available on our website.

What you should do if your child displays flu-like symptoms:

The exclusion criterion recommended by the CDC and DPH as of this time states that if your child displays flu-like symptoms (a fever of 100°F *and* a cough *or* a sore throat) they should be kept home and not attend school until they are symptom-free for 24 hours after fever is gone – without the use of fever-reducing medication (e.g. Tylenol). The criterion is subject to change, so please check our website www.westonk12-ct.org for up-to-date information. *When you contact your child's school to report the absence, it would be helpful if you report that he or she is displaying "flu-like" symptoms. Consult with your child's pediatrician regarding treatment.*

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According to the CDC and DPH, one of the most effective ways to slow or prevent the spread of the flu is “social distancing”. This means that when your child has presented flu-like symptoms and is out of school you should make every effort to avoid having him or her in contact with other children. We realize that this could be an inconvenience, but it is very important if we are to restrict the spread of H1N1 Flu. We had a number of instances in the spring where sick children were sent to school because they had an important test or a field trip and this resulted in the flu being spread to other students, prolonging our outbreak. If your child is kept home, please check with his or her teacher(s) for assignments or to make up tests.

What we can all do to mitigate the effects of a flu outbreak:

According to the CDC and DPH, proper hand washing or sanitizing, and social distancing are two of the most effective ways to restrict the spread of influenza. These steps should be reinforced at school and at home. We will remain in active contact with the Weston-Westport Health District and the Town’s Flu Response Team.

If you or your child has a compromised immune system or other condition that would classify you as “high risk”, you should consult with your physician to see if you or your child should take additional precautionary measures.

At this time The Federal Government is planning to provide H1N1 vaccine for school-aged children. Vaccines will be administered primarily through local physicians.

How a decision to close school(s) will be made:

The research on the effect of school closing on the spread of the flu is inconclusive and we will likely not close school unless the level of student/faculty absenteeism interferes with our ability to function. In this event, the decision to close school(s) will be made by the Superintendent in consultation with the Weston-Westport Health District. This decision will be made according to CDC and DPH guidelines in effect at the time.

When this decision is made, the information will be posted on our website and we will notify parents by phone using the AlertNow system. The AlertNow system is not foolproof, which is another reason to check our website if you have any questions.

Although there are many uncertainties associated with the H1N1 Flu, the Weston Public Schools will continue to work closely with the Weston-Westport Health District and follow the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and the State Department of Public Health. We thank you for your patience, understanding, assistance and cooperation.

Best wishes for a healthy and productive school year.

Jerome R. Belair
Superintendent of Schools

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