

Board of Health

September 4, 2009

Dear Parent:

Each fall and winter, illnesses such as colds and the flu circulate in our community. I want to assure you that the DeKalb County Board of Health is working closely with the DeKalb County School System to prevent children and staff from becoming ill.

Children are especially vulnerable to getting colds and the flu. As we enter the 2009–2010 flu season, we are preparing for both seasonal flu and novel H1N1 influenza. Just like seasonal flu, novel H1N1 spreads mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by infected people. Individuals may also become infected by touching commonly used surfaces such as doorknobs, desks or bathroom fixtures that may have the flu virus on them.

The symptoms of novel H1N1 are the same as seasonal flu. They include fever, fatigue, lack of appetite and coughing. Some people also experience runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Below are some simple measures you can take to **prevent the spread of germs and illness**:

- We recommend that all students be up-to-date on their immunizations and get a **seasonal flu shot** at any Board of Health location (listing enclosed). Flu shots are available now. In October, you may also want your child to get the **two-dose novel H1N1 vaccine**. The flu vaccine program is voluntary and provides an excellent defense to protect your child from becoming sick.
- **Good hand washing** is absolutely essential and the best way to prevent the spread of germs. Please encourage your child to wash their hands frequently for at least 20 seconds (about the time it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice) with soap and water. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective. Children should wash their hands before eating, after going to the bathroom, and after they cough, sneeze or blow their nose.
- Teach your children to use a tissue when coughing, sneezing or blowing their nose. They should properly dispose of used tissues and avoid touching their eyes, nose or mouth. If tissues are not available, children should **cover coughs and sneezes** with their elbows.
- **If your child is sick and/or has a fever, please keep them at home. You should also limit their contact with other children.** If your child has flu-like symptoms, contact your child’s doctor or health care provider.

In addition to using these measures, I want to advise you that your child's school or child care center is your best partner for information that may affect your child's health. Based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, the following procedures will be followed by your school or child care center:

- If there is a confirmed case of the novel H1N1 virus in your school or center, it will be treated as a seasonal flu case.
- The school or center will decide whether to notify parents about any student who is diagnosed with H1N1 within a school or child care setting. You may receive a letter just as you do with other common childhood diseases.
- All schools and child care centers have been instructed on how to minimize the risk of an H1N1 outbreak. They have also been given guidance regarding school closure policies.

To learn more, please visit the DeKalb County Board of Health's Web site at www.dekalbhealth.net.

By working together, we can ensure a safe and healthy school year for our children. If you have any questions regarding seasonal flu or novel H1N1 influenza, please call the DeKalb County Board of Health at (404) 294-3700 and ask to speak to an infectious disease control educator.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. Elizabeth Ford". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

S. Elizabeth Ford, M.D., M.B.A.
District Health Director