

August 25, 2009

Dear Parents/Guardians:

As a new school year begins, your child's health and readiness to be successful in school are very important to us. We are working closely together to monitor influenza (flu) conditions and make decisions about the best steps to take to protect the health and safety of students. We will keep you updated with new information as it becomes available to us.

As you may know, flu (seasonal and H1N1) can be easily spread from person to person. Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS) has a plan to help reduce the spread of flu and to keep our schools functioning as usual. But we need your help. Some commonly asked questions include:

What can I do as a parent to protect my children against the flu?

- Teach your children good hand hygiene. Washing hands often with soap and water is the most important way to prevent the spread of illness. Hand washing should last 20 seconds (about the time it takes to sing *Happy Birthday* twice). Washing after coughing or sneezing helps prevent a person with the flu from spreading it to others. Washing hands before you eat or put your hands near your nose or mouth helps prevent you from getting the flu. Hand sanitizers, containing at least 60 percent alcohol, are also effective if soap and water are unavailable. BCPS permits students to carry hand sanitizer for personal use. Set a good example by using good hand hygiene yourself.
- Teach your children to cover their mouths and noses when they cough or sneeze. If a tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into the elbow or sleeve, not the hands.
- Remind your children not to share personal items like drinks, food, or unwashed utensils.
- Contact your health care provider to get your family vaccinated for seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 when it is available.

What are signs or symptoms of the flu?

- Symptoms include: fever (100 degrees or higher) with cough, sore throat, a runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, and feeling very tired. Some people may vomit or have diarrhea. Children with fever feel warm to the touch, may appear flushed, and may sweat or shiver.

What if my child has symptoms of a flu-like illness (gets sick)?

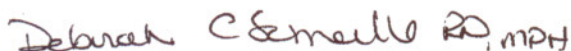
- Sick children need to stay home for at least 24 hours after there is no longer a fever or signs of a fever (without the use of fever-reducing drugs). Keeping a child with a fever home helps reduce the spread of flu.
- If your child has a health condition that places him/her at risk of flu complications, contact your health care provider at the first sign of illness.

What other steps should I do to be prepared?

- Plan now for your children's care at home if your children become ill with the flu.
- Stay informed about flu in our area. We encourage you to visit www.flu.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO for the most current information. For more information on what our school system is doing or about flu in our community, visit www.bcps.org and www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/health.

We are looking forward to a healthy, successful school year and will continue to keep you informed of any changes in our recommendations to you or in the school system's plan to reduce the spread of flu.

Sincerely,



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