



August 21, 2009

Dear School Employee,

As the Health Officer for Santa Clara County, I would like to take a moment to update you on the latest information we have regarding the pandemic H1N1 flu virus (also call the “swine flu”). As you may know, pandemic influenza (flu) is a world-wide outbreak caused by a new flu virus. The virus spreads easily, and since this is a new flu virus, people have little or no immunity – or protection – against it. Historically, pandemic influenza has caused widespread harm and death.

You probably remember that in April 2009, a new flu virus called novel H1N1 influenza (early on called “swine flu”) started making people ill. The H1N1 flu spread from person-to-person, much the same way that regular seasonal flu viruses spread. Now the new flu virus is called **pandemic H1N1**.

There are differences between pandemic flu and seasonal flu. Seasonal flu outbreaks are caused by more well known virus strains. Seasonal flu happens every year, usually during winter months, and pandemic flu is caused by a virus that is new to people. It is likely that pandemic flu will affect more people than seasonal flu because we have little or no immunity against it. Also, a flu pandemic could last longer than a typical flu season.

Both seasonal flu and the pandemic H1N1 flu viruses are expected to cause significant illness in this school year. Since flu viruses constantly change, scientists and health professionals remain concerned that, as this new pandemic H1N1 flu virus continues to pass through populations, it could mutate (change) and cause more severe illness and deaths. Even if this does not happen, we expect there will be large numbers of sick people, which could overwhelm community resources.

Most people who get sick with flu get better without any medical attention. This has been true for the pandemic H1N1 flu virus. And most people who have been sick with the H1N1 flu have been taken care of at home and have fully recovered. Recovering from an H1N1 infection gives that person lifelong immunity from that H1N1 strain of flu. Those most at-risk for serious illness and even death from pandemic H1N1 are children under the age of 5 years, especially those less than 2 years of age, pregnant women, and people with health problems or weakened immune systems.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) expects that illness will continue for some time. Since we expect the pandemic H1N1 virus to continuing to circulate, because we have no immunity, and because a vaccine will not be available to everyone - you and people around you may become ill. Given that, there is still much we can do to limit the spread of this disease in our community.

You need to recognize the symptoms of flu and know what to do. It doesn't really matter which flu you may have, the symptoms of seasonal flu and pandemic H1N1 flu are similar and how you treat your symptoms is very much the same. These symptoms include **fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue**. A large number of people, especially children, who have been infected with pandemic H1N1 flu have also reported diarrhea and vomiting.

***Dedicated to the health of the whole community***

*The Public Health Department is a division of Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System, owned and operated by the County of Santa Clara.*



To ensure a healthy school environment, we encourage staff to do the following:

1. **Get your seasonal flu vaccine.** Since both the seasonal flu and the pandemic H1N1 viruses will be circulating at the same time it is critical that you get the seasonal flu vaccine. There will be a separate vaccine for pandemic H1N1 which will be available to specific risk groups earlier on. For more information about H1N1 vaccine prioritization, and whether you may be in one of those risk groups, please go to [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).
2. **Stay home if you are sick.** If you have influenza-like symptoms, the best thing you can do to limit the spread of disease is to stay at home. And stay home until you don't have a fever for 24 hours after you've stopped taken medication. If your symptoms get worse, be sure to contact your health care provider. Please remember, not everyone with flu symptoms needs to be seen by a health care provider or be tested for influenza.
3. **Send sick students home.** If your students are showing influenza-like symptoms, please send them home. Parents will be receiving a Seasonal Flu & Pandemic H1N1 Flu Back-to-School letter which will explain what to do when their child becomes ill.

The Public Health Department is working closely with the County Office of Education, school district superintendents and school nurses to protect the health of students and staff. Since the situation with the pandemic H1N1 virus continues to evolve, we need your cooperation and patience as the recommendations we issue may change over time.

For additional information regarding pandemic H1N1 please visit the Public Health Department's web site at [www.sccphd.org](http://www.sccphd.org). If you have questions, you may call the Public Health Disease Prevention and Control Program at 408-885-4214 and ask to speak with a public health nurse.

I sincerely hope you have a successful school year and that you and your students stay healthy!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Martin Fenstersheib MD".

Marty Fenstersheib, MD, MPH  
Health Officer  
Santa Clara County