



County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION

Press Release

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Back to School:

What your family needs to know about Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Flu

As students go back to school this year, school and health officials urge parents, students, and teachers to do their part in slowing the spread of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 flu. "The best way to slow the spread of H1N1 is for everyone in the community to do their part," states Dr. Poki Namkung, the County Health Officer. "It's a shared responsibility to keep our schools safe by staying home when you are sick, covering your cough, and washing your hands frequently."

Health and school officials are expecting a challenging flu season as children return to school this year. "The flu spreads when people congregate and Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 flu attacks the young at higher rates," says Dr. Namkung. "If we protect our children, we can also protect the larger community."

School districts are increasing efforts to remind parents and families about the importance of hand washing, covering coughs, and staying home when sick. The Santa Cruz County Office of Education (SCCOE) is taking the lead in providing information to all school districts with the latest CDC advisories, parent information letters, and prevention materials. In addition, the SCCOE is working with local health officials and key district personnel to develop a flu tracking system to monitor any increase in flu-like symptom outbreaks. "Our highest priority, as always, is the safety and well-being of our students, we are taking a leadership role to keep parents and the community informed of the latest breaking guidance for schools," states Michael Watkins' the County School Superintendent.

At this time, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advises schools to remain open. "School is the best place for a well child," states Dr. Marty Cetron of the CDC. The CDC currently recommends a school dismissal only when the number of students and teachers absent due to the flu is high enough to interfere with school's ability to function or if there is no other way to protect high-risk children in attendance.

What parents and families can do to keep schools healthy

- Check your children for symptoms of influenza (fever and cough or sore throat).

- Keep sick people at home until they are fever-free for 24 hours minimum without fever-reducing medications and feel well. Isolate them at home and do not send them to school or childcare.
- Teach your children to wash their hands often with soap and water.
- Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of the elbow. And always wash their hands afterwards or use alcohol-based hand cleaners.
- Teach your children to stay at least six feet away from people who are sick (two arms lengths away).

Is there a vaccine?

A vaccine to protect against Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 flu is currently undergoing clinical trials. When it is available, children will be recommended to receive the vaccine early. But with the first H1N1 vaccine not available now, health officials said people need to practice good hygiene and make plans for what they'll do if they or their family members get sick.

The vaccine for H1N1 is not expected to provide protection against seasonal flu and people may need two shots for it to be effective because H1N1 2009 is a novel virus. Nor is seasonal influenza vaccine likely to protect against H1N1 2009. This means people may need three to four shots this season to be protected against both viruses.

For more information

More information about H1N1 is available at:

- www.santacruzhealth.org/swineflu or <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu>. Residents may also call our information line at (831) 454-4343.
- CDPH Swine Flu page <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/SwineInfluenza.aspx>
- www.santacruz.k12.ca.us

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