

Dear Parent:

As we begin a new school year, we want to update you on what we are doing to reduce the spread of influenza (flu) and ways you can help to keep all students healthy and in school. We will be following national recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention not to close schools. Therefore, it will be important for you to follow guidance from school, public health officials, and your family doctor(s).

There are two types of flu this year. Seasonal (or common flu) is a respiratory illness caused by a virus that spreads when people cough and sneeze on other people or into their hands. H1N1 (sometimes called swine flu) is the other type of flu we're seeing this year. Like seasonal flu, it spreads the same way, its symptoms are similar, and measures to prevent its spread are the same. Flu causes illness ranging from mild to severe, including hospitalizations and more rarely, deaths in adults and children. State and national public health officials are predicting that 30-50% of the population may get sick with flu this fall. Below are the steps you can take to help protect your family and others.

Flu Vaccination

Vaccines are the best way to prevent the flu. This year there will be two types of flu vaccine offered over the fall and winter, one for seasonal flu and one for H1N1 flu. The seasonal flu vaccine is available in school for high school students through the Vaccinate Before You Graduate Program, or through your child's doctor. The Rhode Island Department of Health recommends that all school-age children get vaccinated every year against seasonal flu. Make plans now for your child to be vaccinated against seasonal flu as soon as possible.

An H1N1 flu vaccine will also be available starting in October and is strongly recommended for school age children. We are working with the Department of Health on plans to provide H1N1 flu vaccine to students of all ages at our school through vaccination clinics. You will receive information about the details of the H1N1 flu vaccination clinics in the next few weeks.

Other Ways to Prevent the Spread of Flu

In addition to getting vaccinated, there are other things you and your kids should do to prevent the spread of flu:

- 1) Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand gel. Students may carry hand gel in school.
- 2) Cough and sneeze into your elbow, not your hand.
- 3) Do not share eating or drinking utensils (e.g. forks, spoons, cups, straws, water bottles).
- 4) People who are sick with flu-like symptoms should stay home until they have been fever free (100° F / 37.8° C or lower) for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications. Flu-like symptoms include fever and a sore throat or fever and a cough. Other symptoms include: headache; muscle and joint aches; nausea, vomiting or diarrhea; fatigue; pneumonia, and shortness of breath.

We will continually reinforce these prevention methods with all students and we ask you to do the same with your children at home.

If You or Your Child Get Sick

If you or your child are sick with influenza-like illness, it is especially important to follow good coughing, sneezing, and hand washing practices. You should also stay home until you have been fever free (100° F / 37.8° C or lower) for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications.

Most people who develop flu-like symptoms this fall will feel very sick for a few days and then it will pass. It is important to spend that time at home and not in the emergency room or a doctor's office. However, if you are worried about symptoms and would normally call a doctor, you should do so and your doctor will decide whether you or your child should be seen. It is important not to go to a doctor without calling first because you or your child may not have flu but could catch it by being around sick people. There is also little treatment for flu for most people – most people simply need to drink fluids, rest, and take fever-reducing medicine. Anti-viral medication, such as Tamiflu, is recommended for children who have an underlying medical condition. All others do not need anti-viral medication.

For More Information

You will receive more information about H1N1 flu vaccination as it becomes available. For general information about the flu, including information about caring for sick people at home, visit the Rhode Island Department of Health website: www.health.ri.gov and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: www.flu.gov. The Rhode Island Department of Health also runs an English and Spanish flu information line at 401-222-8022 (8:30 am to 4:30 pm).

We look forward to working with you for a healthful and productive academic year.