

Dear Parent:

Only a few months ago you were being warned about the novel H1N1 or “Swine” Flu. Unfortunately, we are starting school in much the same manner.

This novel flu is still circulating in Arizona and it appears that it is affecting our younger population at a higher rate than our normal “seasonal” flu. The Mohave County Department of Public Health reports that nationwide more than half of those hospitalized have been school or pre-school aged children. Many more cases are possible this fall. Because of this, we all need to increase our efforts to keep our school community and your home environment flu-free.

You play an important role in how the flu will affect our school and ultimately the health of our community. By taking the following actions, you can help us cut down the rate of flu transmission in our community:

1. **Teach your children good hygiene (we will be doing the same at school):** This means covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or their sleeve, washing their hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds, and keeping their hands away from their face.
2. **Keep your children home when they are sick:** When a child comes to school sick, he or she can infect classmates at amazing rates. You should plan to keep your child home for 7 days after the onset of flu-like symptoms. Preparing your family now will help you take care of your child if he or she does get sick. If too many children are sick at school, we may be required to implement extreme measures such as closing the school, which has a negative effect on all of us.
3. **Consider seasonal flu vaccine:** Although there won't be a vaccine for the novel flu until later this fall, regular seasonal flu vaccine should be available in September. While seasonal flu vaccine will not protect us against the novel flu, it will help decrease the spread of regular flu in our communities.

The Mohave County Department of Public Health is encouraging parents to get their children vaccinated with seasonal flu vaccine. If you do not have a primary care doctor or your doctor does not have flu vaccine, contact the nursing office of your local health department.

We are monitoring flu-like illness closely and will be reporting abnormal absentee rates to the Mohave County Department of Public Health. However, we cannot stress enough that it will be our parents who will ultimately make the largest impact on the health of our school.

Please visit the following websites if you need further information on this emerging public health threat: www.cdc.gov or www.healthelinks.com.

SINCERELY,
Mohave Valley Elementary School District #16



Dear School Administrator,

This letter is sent to begin planning for the potential next wave of the novel H1N1 influenza (swine flu). Historically, pandemics have always had a second wave of illness and it is the second wave that has infected the most people. If we don't effectively intervene and slow the spread of the virus, we could expect a lot of us, perhaps up to 25% of the population, to get this new flu during the second wave. This would mean fifty thousand Mohave County residents getting this new flu during the second wave.

If history is our guide, we expect the second wave of the novel flu virus to pick up steam as we head into our "regular" flu season. This could be as early as August or as late as December. I understand that you will not only be concerned about your students' well being, but on a very practical note, a second wave of H1N1 influenza and regular flu may coincide to create absenteeism that could be devastating to your budget. Working together, I believe that we can greatly reduce the number of students affected and the toll on our community.

It is believed that schools will bear the brunt of illness as school-aged children are the most likely to get sick. Children are always the primary amplifiers for the flu; they efficiently pass it around to each other and start the flu season for the rest of us. So far, this novel flu virus has disproportionately affected young people. More than half of the hospitalized patients nationwide are school or pre-school aged children. That is highly unusual, even if most of them have had pre-existing risk factors (e.g. asthma, diabetes, etc.). It is expected that a second wave will continue to disproportionately strike children and young adults.

It is important to note that virulence (how sick it makes people) will be the key during the second wave. We've been saying that the virus isn't yet looking excessively lethal. However, flu viruses mutate all the time and many slightly different variations of the novel flu virus will evolve all over the world. Virulence will vary and often be more severe in the second wave causing more people to become ill. Inevitably, more people here will become seriously ill and it may cause deaths in our communities.

I don't mean to exaggerate the risk or to scare anyone. I hope that, although many of us may get sick, it will not be much worse than regular flu. But, you need to understand that this is deadly serious and we need to be prepared. The following actions will help us be prepared for a second wave of illness.

Flu vaccinations

We do not have vaccine for the novel flu virus yet. Clinical trials for the vaccine are underway and, if produced, the earliest we anticipate receiving vaccine is late fall. Depending on how much pandemic flu is circulating and how sick it is making people; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) may recommend vaccinating children as a priority. The only efficient way to vaccinate nearly all children is to conduct mass vaccination clinics in the schools. If this is the recommendation, we will work with you on the details of these clinics as we receive more information and guidance from the CDC.

We will have regular, seasonal flu vaccine. While seasonal flu vaccine will not protect us against the novel flu, we will be strongly recommending it for all children as it will help to decrease the spread of regular flu in the community. We would like you to encourage parents to get their children vaccinated with seasonal flu vaccine. If your students do not have a primary care doctor or their doctor does not have flu vaccine, they should contact the nursing office of their local health department.



Hygiene

Your schools will play a key role in teaching kids to practice good hygiene to keep from catching or spreading flu and to keep kids healthy and at school. Good hygiene includes: washing our hands often, keeping our hands away from our faces, and covering our coughs and sneezes with a tissue or a sleeve. This will be important for kids, so please reinforce and model this.

Monitoring for Influenza-Like Illness

School nurses and other staff will play a key role in reinforcing the rule that sick kids cannot come to school – and sending them home if they do. In the long run, you will have less absenteeism by keeping them from infecting others. School staff will need to identify early influenza-like symptoms, separate those kids from their classrooms, and send them promptly home. School nurses have proven extremely valuable so far, and we will need that to continue. We will not be asking you to continue the task of compiling absenteeism and symptom data, but we will need your school nurses and/or attendance clerks to call us when they see absenteeism that is out of the ordinary.

Business Continuity

If you haven't reviewed your school's business continuity plan, please do so now. If you don't have one, the Arizona Department of Education recently sent out information on creating such plans. If the pandemic takes a serious turn for the worse and becomes much more virulent, we may need to close schools until the entire thing is over. That's obviously the worst case scenario and we don't want it to come to that. However, you need to consider what decisions you will need to make if you are faced with a prolonged school closure.

I would like to be able to meet with school administrators and/or their designees to answer questions and to continue planning efforts. I believe the easiest way to do this is for me or my staff to attend a meeting you may already have established and provide time on the agenda for this discussion. Please contact my secretary, Krista Gunnoe, at 753-0774 to advise her if there is a meeting we can attend.

In addition, we have drafted a letter for you to consider sending to parents as the school year begins. Please edit this letter as you see fit.

Please know that our goal for all of this will not only be to limit disease and deaths, but also to help keep our society and the educational system functioning.

Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Patty Mead

Patty Mead, RN, MS
Health Director
