

May 5, 2009

Dear Parents, Students, and Staff,

Martinsville City Schools is working closely with the Martinsville Health Department to monitor H1N1, previously known as swine flu, locally and nationally. At this time, there are no confirmed cases within Martinsville City Schools; however, we are monitoring schools for signs of illness among staff and students.

We ask for your help in paying attention to your health and the health of our students. Symptoms of H1N1 are similar to those of regular influenza (flu) and can include fever, cough, sore throat, chills, fatigue and body aches. Gastrointestinal symptoms like vomiting and diarrhea can be present as well. The annual flu shot does not offer protection against this particular virus.

Please be reminded of the following good hygiene tips:

- Wash your hands often. Washing with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds is ideal.
- Hand sanitizer (gels, rubs and hand wipes) is also effective. Hand wipes must be disposed of properly. Always read and follow label instructions when using hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose or eyes.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues and dispose of used tissues properly. Cough or sneeze into your sleeve—not your hands.
- Stay away from people who are sick.
- **If you get sick, stay home from work or school, limit contact with others to keep from infecting them, and seek medical attention immediately!!!**

If you should have questions or concerns, please contact me at 403-5735 or the local Health Department at 638-2311.

Sincerely,

Vicky Utt, R.N., School Nurse Coordinator
Cc: Scott Kizner, Superintendent

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is H1N1?

H1N1, previously known as swine flu, is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get H1N1, but human infections can and do happen. Swine flu viruses have been reported to spread from person-to-person, but in the past, this transmission was limited and not sustained beyond three people.

Is H1N1 contagious?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has determined that this virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1 in people?

The symptoms of H1N1 in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with H1N1. In the past, severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with H1N1 infection in people. Like seasonal flu, H1N1 may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

What should I do to keep from getting H1N1?

First and most important: wash your hands. Try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious meals. Try not to touch surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus, and avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Are there medicines to treat H1N1?

Yes. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir (antiviral drugs) for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with these viruses. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within two days of developing symptoms).

Can people catch H1N1 from eating pork?

No. H1N1 is not transmitted by food. You cannot get H1N1 from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products is safe. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160°F kills the virus as it does other bacteria and viruses.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against H1N1. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?

If you are sick, limit your contact with other people as much as possible. Do not go to work or school if ill. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, which may prevent those around you from getting sick. Put your used tissue in the waste basket. Cover your cough or sneeze if you do not have a tissue. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and warm water for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you live in areas where swine influenza cases have been identified and become ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, contact your healthcare provider, particularly if you are worried about your symptoms. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

If you are sick, you should stay home from school or work and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others.