

September 11, 2009

Dear Parent and Community Members,

I want to take a moment and update you all on what is happening across the state and nation regarding the novel H1N1 flu virus.

As you are all aware, the virus outbreak has been labeled a "Pandemic," which means that we have a brand new virus to the human race that has manifested in most populations in the world. Fortunately, the virus has proven no more troublesome than the regular seasonal flu, and most people recover without medical intervention.

The question everyone is asking is, Do we have H1N1 in Habersham County? The answer is yes. According to health officials I met with earlier this week, 99% of cases of current flu in the state are probably H1N1. In fact, medical staff are no longer testing for the virus because it is assumed to be H1N1, and even if it is not, the virus is treated the same as regular flu. The good news is again, the virus is no more dangerous than the regular flu that arrives every winter, and we have been advised to respond to it the same way we would with any other virus or bacterial bug.

If our staff or students come down with a fever or flu-like symptoms, we are sending them home. We then ask them not to return until they are fever-free without medication for 24 hours. We are also taking preventative steps by doing extra handwashing in the classroom and extra cleaning measures to kill germs. You will also feel good to know that our Board of Education has been very supportive in ensuring that we have an adequate nursing staff for our 7000 students, so we have very good access to qualified health professionals.

Based on advice we have received from state and local health officials, our key protocol for handling H1N1 situations will be: How would we have handled this last winter with the regular seasonal flu? Since the symptoms are the same and the treatment is the same, we will handle suspected H1N1 cases very similarly to the regular seasonal flu.

I also encourage each of you to consider getting vaccinated for the seasonal flu AND the H1N1 flu. There will be two separate vaccines this fall, and children over six months will be a priority group. As always, consult with your doctor to see if being vaccinated is right for you and your family.

If you would like more information, please visit the website flu.gov to learn the latest on the flu in America. We promise to follow this situation closely, and we will let you know if new information presents itself so that we can all stand together to keep Habersham healthy!

Sincerely,

Robert Costley, Superintendent

