



DATE:

August 17th, 2009

Parents, teacher, school staff

Pandemic Influenza (Novel H1N1)

As the time to return to school nears, we have been receiving many questions from parents and schools with concerns about pandemic influenza. This letter and the attached brochure, developed by the Centers for Disease Control, may help you understand what to expect and how to be prepared.

While the influenza pandemic (formerly called 'swine' flu) is still underway across the globe, the disease has not been very active in Montana. But it has **not** gone away during the summer like influenza usually does. There is the possibility that when children congregate in schools once again and when the fall and winter flu season returns, that more cases of this new influenza will appear and that the usual seasonal flu could also be present.

The Health Department has been working with Missoula County schools and many others to get ready. We have included a helpful brochure from the Centers of Disease Control. Our goal is to keep schools open to students and functioning in a normal manner during this year's flu season. In order to accomplish this we need your help please:

- Teach your children to wash their hands often with soap and water. Help set a good example by doing this yourself
- Teach your children not to share personal items such as drinks, food, utensils. Ask them to cover their coughs or cough into their arm, elbow or sleeve
- Watch for sign/symptoms of the flu fever 100 degrees or above, cough, sore throat, runny/stuffy nose body aches or headache and feeling very tired
- Keep sick children home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever
- Have a plan to care for your children at home because schools are being encouraged to send sick children home

There are two possibly confusing things: 1) there will be other seasonal influenza in the community just like we have every year. People will be encouraged to get their regular flu shots. The regular flu shots will **not** protect against pandemic influenza. 2) There may also be special flu shots for pandemic flu available to specific high risk people depending on how much vaccine is available in Missoula. Some or all children may be eligible to get it. We will inform everyone regarding vaccine availability and guidelines when the information becomes available.

We will keep the schools and community updated with new information as it becomes available.

If you have questions or concerns regarding pandemic flu you may call the Missoula City County Health Department flu at 258-3500 or visit our website www.ho.missoula.mt.us/health
Please do not contact your school for pandemic flu information.