

August 19, 2009

Dear Valued Staff:

Welcome back and thank you for your commitment to Pinellas County Schools. I hope you are well rested and ready for the start of the 2009/10 school year and the opportunities we have to help children.

As you are undoubtedly aware, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now considers H1NI (swine) influenza a pandemic, and are concerned that the number of cases will continue to increase beginning with the opening of school. As a result, we are taking steps to prepare, mitigate and respond to this health emergency.

Now is the time for all of us to plan for the flu season. Here are some simple precautions you can take to protect yourself, your family, and your co-workers.

1. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or with hand sanitizers if there is no soap or water available.
2. Avoid touching your nose, mouth or eyes to safeguard against infection
3. Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues and wash hands after coughing or sneezing.
4. Avoid using other employees' phones, desks and other work tools and equipment.
5. Minimize contact with those who have flu or flu-like symptoms.
6. If you should experience flu symptoms, the most important thing is to stay at home to recover.

If we do experience a significant amount of flu resulting in increased absences by students and staff we will respond based upon by guidance from CDC, the Department of Education and the Pinellas County Health Department. Rest assured that the safety of students and staff will be of paramount importance as we deal with this health emergency.

Listed below are some of the human resource policies that may apply to this health emergency.

1. If a supervisor suspects that an employee may have a contagious illness such as H1N1 what steps should the supervisor take?
Under policy 8.20, a supervisor is required to refer an employee suspected of carrying a contagious disease to a personal physician. The employee must present a return to work authorization from a licensed physician in order to return to duty.
2. If an employee is sent home does he have to use his/her own time in order to be paid? What happens if he has no leave?
If an employee is sent home, unless the incident can be shown to be worker's compensation related, the employee would have to take sick leave or other paid time off in order to be paid. If he does not have any leave, the time would be unpaid unless it qualifies for worker's compensation as a work-related incident.

3. Is H1N1 illness covered under workers compensation?

H1N1 would only be covered under worker's compensation if it could be proven that the disease was contracted at the work site and was not contracted elsewhere. This would be the same as any other communicable disease covered under Board policy.

4. If a school is closed and employees are sent home, will they be paid?

We will treat such an incident the same as we do when we close schools for hurricanes. Employees will be paid time off and re-scheduled to make up for the lost time. We already have a process in place to do this.

We will continue to update you about any additional measures the district may need to take as the flu season progresses. As flu vaccines become available for both H1N1 and regular flu, we will provide you with additional information. In the meantime, please follow basic precautions to protect your health and the health of your students and fellow employees.

Thank you,

Julie M. Janssen, Ed.D.
Superintendent