

SCCS Health Information News

As the school year progresses (and so does the cold and flu season), preventing illness and the spread of influenza in our school community is also becoming more and more important.

That is where you, as a parent, can play a key role. There are several important things that you can do to help stop the spread of influenza:

- Please keep your child at home if he or she is sick, until he or she is better. If your child is sick with flu-like illness, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that the individual **stay home for at least 24 hours after fever is gone and symptoms have abated**. (The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)
- Encourage your child to wash his or her hands often, especially before eating, or after coughing or sneezing into their hands. Limit touching of your eyes, nose or mouth.
- If your child has a cough, encourage him or her to cover his or her cough with a tissue, or to cough into his or her sleeve.
- If your child is staying at home because of an illness, please contact the staff at your school to let them know why your child is absent and tell the staff what symptoms your child is experiencing (symptoms of influenza include cough, fever, fatigue, muscle aches, sore throat, vomiting or diarrhea).

Keep away from others as much as possible to avoid making others sick. Please be considerate of the health of our teachers and staff, as well as the other children. Though you may think your child is “feeling better” it is important to note that individuals are contagious for 24 hours prior to the onset of symptoms and for 7 days afterwards. This can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems and in people infected with the H1N1 virus. We are asking parents to err on the side of caution and keep children home for at **least 24 hours** after a fever has gone or the child has stopped vomiting.

The CDC recommends that no child under the age of three years old should be permitted to use hand sanitizer. Furthermore, **no child of any age should be permitted to use hand sanitizer without supervision**. For this reason, **we are asking parents to NOT send personal gel hand sanitizers to school with your child**. Hand sanitizer gel and wipes are available in all classrooms and in the office with adult supervision. There have been some instances of improper use and sharing of the personal hand sanitizers, as well as some overuse. Proper hand washing is still the best defense against getting sick. A heavy reliance on hand sanitizer diminishes hand washing and may lead to a false sense of security. It is important to note that the extensive use of these products can lead to

dried, cracked skin that leaves an individual more susceptible to infection. A build up of the gel on hands can also decrease the effectiveness of the sanitizer. It is suggested that hands be washed with soap and water at least after every 8-10 uses of the gel sanitizer. Hand sanitizers do not remove soil or gross contamination from hands; therefore, the CDC recommends that hand sanitizer be used in addition to, not in lieu of, proper hand washing and at times when washing your hands is not possible.

Parents are encouraged to prepare a back-up plan for child care. Please consider:

- Child care arrangements if your child is sick and unable to attend school.
- Child care arrangements if you are sick and require support after school-hours, including a designated person(s) to pick up children should you be unavailable.

The following websites have up-to-date information for parents about Pandemic H1N1 flu and the activities taking place across the province to keep Manitobans healthy.

- For information on H1N1 flu and Manitoba's H1N1 flu prevention efforts. The Manitoba government website: www.manitoba.ca/flu
- The Public Health Agency of Canada also has a website which provides information on H1N1 flu. It can be accessed at: canada.ca/flu

Other helpful information can be found on the following websites:

- Center for Disease Control <http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu/qa.htm>
- WRHA <http://www.wrha.mb.ca/>

This article was prepared with information gathered from the above sources.

Denise George, RN BN, SCCS Pandemic Preparedness Committee member