

A Message about the Flu from the Health Services Office

This past week, we have seen an increase in students and staff with flu-like symptoms or confirmed cases of Type A influenza. Flu-like symptoms and symptoms of Type A influenza include sudden onset of fever over 100 degrees, chills, cough, runny nose, shortness of breath, sore throat, body aches, general feeling of malaise, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

There are 2 general types of influenza, Type A and Type B. Type B is the seasonal flu for which the flu vaccine is given annually. The H1N1 flu strain is a sub-type of Type A. When you see your doctor, they will perform a flu test that will show positive for either Type A or Type B. The actual H1N1 test is only done in the hospital, when someone is hospitalized with severe symptoms. However, if the flu test is positive for Type A, it is probably the H1N1 virus, and doctors will treat accordingly.

Most people who are positive for the Type A influenza will be ill and recover in about a week. Those at high risk for more serious symptoms include people with underlying health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, cardiac concerns, or immunosuppressed conditions (pregnancy, chemotherapy, etc.). These persons should contact their doctor upon onset of flu-like symptoms.

Type A or H1N1 differs from seasonal flu. H1N1 symptoms may be more severe, with a more serious respiratory component than seasonal flu. H1N1 is affecting a younger population than the seasonal flu. There is little to no immunity to the H1N1 virus, whereas some have built up immunity to the seasonal flu. Type A flu is spread mainly by air, droplets through coughing, sneezing, and very close, extended contact with an infected individual. The incubation period is about 3 days, and an individual is most contagious just before and during the fever. According to the CDC, the majority of flu cases being reported currently are Type A influenza.

Vaccine status: For Type A or the H1N1 flu, the vaccine has started to be distributed this week, beginning with more at-risk populations, and will be available to the general public in hopefully a few weeks. For Type B, or the seasonal flu, there is currently a limited supply due to increased public demand and the need to focus resources on producing the H1N1 vaccine. More seasonal flu vaccine should be available in the next few weeks. The seasonal flu and H1N1 vaccines are virtually the same vaccines, addressing different flu strains. They are both very safe vaccines and strongly recommended.

Treatment for the flu is mainly treatment of the symptoms. There is no cure, but antiviral drugs, such as Tamiflu and others, are available for some individuals, especially those at more risk of developing severe symptoms. Antiviral medications slow the replication process of the virus, therefore, are only most effective in the early stages of the infection.

What can you do?

- Continue to use precautions such as covering your mouth with your elbow when coughing or sneezing, washing hands,
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Germs are spread this way, too.
- **Stay home if you are sick.** This is extremely important. **You must stay home until**

you are 24 hours fever-free. Fever-reducing medications such as Advil or Tylenol only reduce the fever. The fever is still present. You are not helping yourself get better and only infecting many others if you do not stay home.

In District 128, we are surveying sick calls daily, monitoring the number of flu-like illnesses in both students and staff. We are sending students and staff home who present with flu-like symptoms, especially those with fever over 100 degrees. We are in close contact with the Lake County Health Department, following recommendations from them and the CDC.

More information about influenza and vaccine status can be found at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

<http://www.lakecountyil.gov/Health/H1N1.htm>

<http://www.flu.gov/index.html>