

# scgovHEALTHAdvisory

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**Media Note: Multiple school absences related to influenza-like illness will not be routinely reported**

## H1N1 (swine flu) update

Today, Sarasota County Emergency Management, Health Department, and the School District held an informal discussion with the media about current H1N1 (swine) flu. The intent was to share information about current H1N1 (swine) flu activity and to reinforce precautions that everyone should take with the approaching Labor Day weekend. The discussion centered around influenza-like illness trends including multiple school absences related to influenza-like illness that are currently under investigation. With schools back in session less than one month, flu activity is likely to increase in area schools; however, instances of multiple flu-related absences will not be routinely reported. Health officials also said that there is an influenza-like illness death in an adult (unrelated to school flu activity) that is not yet laboratory confirmed as H1N1 (swine) flu.

School district and health department officials also reinforced the actions that are in place in schools to help reduce the spread of influenza-like illness in the schools:

- School staff will identify students exhibiting flu-like symptoms will then be evaluated by the Health Room Aide or School Nurse, and isolated if necessary.
- Parents/guardians will then be contacted and requested to pick up their child(ren) as soon as possible.
- The district will make hand sanitizers available for use in classrooms under the supervision of adults.
- Custodians/building supervisors will continue efforts initiated in the spring to clean commonly touched areas (i.e. doorknobs, light switches, handrails, etc.) often.

**Students with influenza-like illness must remain at home for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone (without the use of fever-reducing medicine).** A fever is a temperature which is elevated above 100 degrees. Parents, especially those of medically fragile children – those with ongoing health issues such as asthma, diabetes and other diseases and illnesses are urged to seek out early medical care from their doctor or health care provider. When there are multiple absences in classrooms due to influenza-like illness, school officials will be in communication with parents, using either a letter or the district's telephone notification system.

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PAGE TWO

Sarasota County Health Department is working closely with emergency management, school officials, and healthcare providers in the community on the plans for implementing a mass-vaccination program for H1N1 (swine) flu once the vaccine becomes available. We expect to be able to vaccinate everyone who wants to get the vaccine. However, health officials say that the shipment of vaccine will likely come in weekly batches at least initially. Vaccines will be distributed based upon medical priorities until everyone who wants to be vaccinated receives their immunization. Examples of medical priority groups outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention include:

- **Pregnant women** because they are at higher risk of complications and can potentially provide protection to infants who cannot be vaccinated;
- **Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age** because younger infants are at higher risk of influenza-related complications and cannot be vaccinated. Vaccination of those in close contact with infants less than 6 months old might help protect infants by “cocooning” them from the virus;
- **Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel** because infections among healthcare workers have been reported and this can be a potential source of infection for vulnerable patients. Also, increased absenteeism in this population could reduce healthcare system capacity;
- **All people from 6 months through 24 years of age**
- **Persons aged 25 through 64 years who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza.**

The Sarasota County Health Department is working closely with school officials to establish the best means to get the vaccine to school-age children as quickly as possible. Once the details have been finalized, this information will be shared with the public.

People are reminded to follow these everyday precautions especially until a vaccine is available:

1. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the inside of your elbow.
2. Wash hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand gel, especially after coughing and sneezing.
3. Do not touch eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
4. Avoid contact with those who are ill.

This information will also be shared in an H1N1 (swine) flu community forum planned for 3 p.m. on Monday, Sept. 14 at the Sarasota County Administration Center Commission Chambers, 1660 Ringling Boulevard in Sarasota. Residents can attend in person or view on Access Sarasota Television (Comcast Channel 19 or Verizon Channel 32). Questions will be taken during the broadcast and may be by e-mail submitted to [communityconnections@scgov.net](mailto:communityconnections@scgov.net), or by phone to 941-861-2255 (active beginning September 14, 2009).

For more H1N1 (swine) flu information, visit the Sarasota County Health Department’s web site: [www.sarasotahealth.org](http://www.sarasotahealth.org) or call the Sarasota County Health Department’s Flu Information Line at 941-861-2800.

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