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## Health Department and School District officials prepare for flu as school resumes

Sarasota County Emergency Management, Health Department and Sarasota County Schools provided a briefing this afternoon about how H1N1 (swine) flu preparations for the 2009/10 school year. Sarasota County Health Department officials say this virus is widespread in our community so they fully expect to see flu activity when schools re-open.

“School and health department officials are reaching out to parents and school staff to equip them with the information needed to promote a healthy school environment. It is important that parents keep their children home from school if they become ill. This means that working parents should have a plan for child care if their child becomes ill,” said William Heymann, M.D., F.A.C.E.P., medical director for the Sarasota County Health Department.

The school district has worked closely with the Health Department to train and equip health room staff, nurses and other school staff on ways to reduce the spread of the H1N1 (Swine) flu virus. “Our plan is flexible and may change as warranted. We are following the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Sarasota County Health Department on any decisions that would impact schools. These decisions will be made locally on a case-by-case basis,” said Lori White, Superintendent of Sarasota County Schools.

The district has worked with the Health Department to put actions in place to address H1N1 (Swine) Flu concerns during the 2009/10 school year:

- School staff will identify students exhibiting flu-like symptoms who 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.

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Sarasota County Health Department and school district officials will continue to work closely together using a computerized monitoring system to track student symptoms and attendance. This tool along with reports from staff will help determine if any additional steps/action is warranted. Parents will be notified using the district's automated telephone message system and other means as appropriate.

Health Department and school district officials emphasize that there are everyday actions that everyone can do to help reduce the spread of H1N1 (swine) flu:

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.

These topics will be included in a telephone message to parents as well as parent letter that school officials will be distributed on the first day of school, Monday, Aug. 24. The same information will be posted on the Sarasota County School District Web site:  
[www.sarasotacountyschools.net](http://www.sarasotacountyschools.net).

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