



NORTHWEST GEORGIA PUBLIC HEALTH

C. Wade Sellers, MD, MPH District Health Director

August 2009

Dear Parents:

Many of you have heard news reports about novel influenza A (H1N1), also known as novel H1N1 or swine flu, in the US, in our state and in northwest Georgia. While we are still learning about this new virus, it has become clear that children and teens are among those most at risk of catching it. Protecting your child's health and safety are top concerns, and working as a team is the most effective approach. Therefore, we want to share information with you about novel H1N1, how we're responding and what you can do as well. Everyone has a role in protecting themselves, their families and their community.

The symptoms of novel H1N1 are similar to regular seasonal flu. Most people with novel H1N1 experience fever with a cough or sore throat. Additional symptoms include lethargy, lack of appetite, runny nose, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. Most people who get it recover at home in approximately a week, same as with seasonal flu.

A vaccine to protect against novel H1N1 has been developed and is currently undergoing clinical trials. We hope to have it available for voluntary vaccinations as early as mid-October; however, it could be later in the fall. Until then, it is important to take steps to prevent the spread of illness in our childcare centers and schools – not just novel H1N1, but any kind of virus. These are everyday actions you and your children can take to stay healthy:

- Do not send your child to school with a fever. Keep children with flu-like illness at home so they don't infect others.
- Sick children should not return to school or participate in any activities putting them in contact with others until their fever has been gone for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze (using your sleeve is good). If you use a tissue to cover coughs or sneezes, throw it in the trash after you use it. Teach your children to do the same.
- Avoid giving children aspirin and products that contain aspirin. Aspirin has been linked to Reyes Syndrome.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective. Be a good role model for your children.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Have your family – including your children – vaccinated against regular seasonal flu just as soon as possible.

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People who develop severe illness (high fevers lasting more than three days, difficulty breathing or other serious symptoms) should contact their local healthcare provider immediately. However, people who do not have underlying at-risk medical conditions who develop mild flu-like symptoms or who think they were exposed but don't have any symptoms need not seek medical attention.

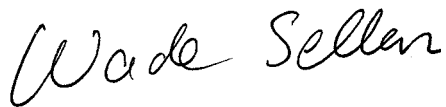
For now, public health is not recommending schools close when novel H1N1 infections occur in students and/or faculty. However, we are working closely with your school and other partners to monitor the situation. Recommendations may change as the disease spreads, as we learn more about it or if the virus changes.

Children are among those slated to receive the first doses of novel H1N1 vaccines. It is vitally important that you stay informed. Listen and watch for announcements from your school and county health department about vaccine availability, school closings and other matters involving the pandemic.

Remember to follow your school's absenteeism-and-sick policy. Notifying the appropriate school staff of your child's illness promptly will help school officials take appropriate actions to protect the health of students and staff.

For more information about novel H1N1, contact your local county health department or go online to <http://www.nwgapublichealth.org/>, www.cdc.gov or www.flu.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Wade Sellers".

C. Wade Sellers, M.D., M.P.H.
District Health Director



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Preparing for Pandemic Flu: What You Need to Know

The World Health Organization (WHO) has officially declared novel H1N1 influenza A (swine flu) a global pandemic. That means that there are outbreaks of the virus all over the world, including the U.S. So far, most cases of the virus have been mild or moderate; however, there is no way to predict how severe the virus could become.

There are things you can do now to prepare. Having certain items on hand will be useful if you need to stay home during an emergency such as a flu pandemic.

Create an emergency supply kit that includes:

- A 2-week supply of bottled water (one gallon per family member per day. Include extra water for pets)
- At least a 2-week supply of nonperishable, ready-to-eat food such as canned fruits, meats and vegetables, protein bars, crackers, dry cereal, fruit juices, etc.
- Pet food, if needed
- Baby food or formula and diapers, if needed
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Manual can opener, disposable plates and utensils, garbage bags, toilet paper, paper towels, feminine hygiene products, and hand sanitizer
- Over-the-counter medications for fever, pain, diarrhea, coughs and colds
- Thermometer

You should also:

- Remind your family to practice healthy habits
- Learn home treatment for flu
- Get a flu shot as soon as possible this year. It's still the best way to protect yourself from seasonal flu.
- Find out about your employer's plans for a flu pandemic

- Make backup plans for possible school or work closings and other disruptions
- Have a copy of each family member's medical history.
- Continue to check credible sources of information regarding pandemic flu including <http://www.nwgapublichealth.org/>, www.cdc.gov or www.flu.gov.

