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September 3, 2009

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Throughout the month of August I attended several mandated state and county training sessions for superintendents and local health department officials regarding H1N1 Flu. Presentations were made by national, state and county officials, including a web-cast by President Obama and the Secretary of Health. This letter is the first of several I will send to you during the 2009-10 school year to provide updates and to serve as an ongoing dialogue between home and school concerning the H1N1 flu (also known as the "swine" flu). National, state and local agencies are updating us on a weekly, and sometimes daily, basis regarding the status of H1N1 and what we might expect once schools open in the fall.

I want to reassure you that nothing is more important to us than the health and safety of our students and staff. We will continue to be as vigilant as possible in our fight to keep H1N1 at bay. With a community-wide teamwork approach, I am confident that The Somerset Hills School District can weather this storm and continue to provide a safe and secure learning environment for your children. At each of the sessions I attended, health officials stated that the symptoms of H1N1 continue to be less severe than the regular flu.

At this time, I would like to review some precautions that are still very much in place from last spring, as well as highlight some changes for the fall, as follows:

1. There is still unanimous consent among health experts that the individual precautions designed to limit the spread of this flu remain the best way to limit its transmission and to avoid getting it. As a reminder, these are:
  - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. If a tissue is not readily available, cough or sneeze into your elbow or shirt sleeve.
  - Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
  - Stay home if you get sick (see below for timeframes on this).
2. School attendance guidelines have changed slightly from the spring. Effective immediately, people who experience "flu-like symptoms" (100 degree or higher fever along with a cough and/or sore throat) are to stay home until they have been fever-free (without the use of fever-reducing medicine) for a full 24 hours.  
This reverts back to our district's normal procedures for flu-like illness.
3. People with flu-like symptoms are no longer being asked to stay home for seven days after the onset of symptoms (although the district could reinstitute this additional requirement should it experience a particularly extensive outbreak).

4. Until fever free (without the use of fever-reducing medicine) for 24 hours, it is still highly recommended to avoid public places like shopping malls, ball fields, etc. (a containment technique known as “social distancing”).
5. Per Federal and State guidance, it is very unlikely that we will close schools in response to H1N1, as this is to be reserved only for very severe outbreaks. Careful and strict adherence to the above precautions and attendance guidelines is instead the recommended course of action.

With regard to vaccines, it is expected that a vaccine for the H1N1 flu will be available mid to late October. I will be sure to share with you any updates we get. We do know that the annual, seasonal flu vaccine does NOT work against H1N1. **Health experts are encouraging people to get the regular, seasonal flu vaccine as early as possible this year, and they are also encouraging people to get the H1N1 vaccine once it becomes available.** The target population for the H1N1 vaccine are those age 25 and under, and other members of the general population who are pregnant, or have an ongoing medical condition. Consultation with your personal physical is highly recommended. Just to reiterate, the vaccines are not the same and people are being encouraged to get BOTH.

As always, any specific health questions should be referred to individual family physicians. We will throughout the school year send out updates via EdLine and post information and other resources on our district Web site as we get them ([www.shsd.org](http://www.shsd.org)). Also, the Federal government’s Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Web site has an extensive bank of information and resources—it can be found at [www.cdc.gov/H1N1/](http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1/).

We will continue to do everything we can to keep you as informed as possible on this very important health and safety matter as the school year progresses.

Sincerely,

Pete Miller  
Superintendent