

School officials ready for H1N1 flu

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Thursday, 10 September 2009 18:31 - Last Updated Thursday, 10 September 2009 18:34



Cornwell: No known cases yet.

Local school officials have a plan to deal with H1N1 and seasonal flu if District 20 students are affected.

Already, several schools in Nebraska—including 20% of the population at Lincoln's Pius X High School—have reported outbreaks of the H1N1 virus which is also called swine flu.

School nurse Annie Cornwell outlined the strategy for school board members at a Sept. 2 special meeting and board retreat.

Cornwell said there haven't yet been any confirmed cases of H1N1 that officials know about at Gothenburg Public Schools.

But from her understanding, Cornwell said the state only requests documentation of people hospitalized or who have died from the virus.

Already, Cornwell said students are encouraged to wash hands thoroughly or use sanitizer and have been taught "cough" etiquette to prevent germs from spreading.

Such encouragement will be stepped up, Cornwell said, as well as putting hand sanitizer in more places throughout the school.

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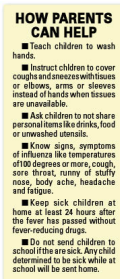
Custodians are also doing their part by disinfecting rooms, hallway telephones and other things touched by students.

Cornwell said the state health department also sent masks to schools.

“If there’s an outbreak, we’ll be advised what to do,” she said.

If a child displays flu symptoms while at school—fever of 100 degrees or more with a cough/and or sore throat—he or she will be given a mask to wear until a parent or guardian arrives to take the child home.

The child’s backpack, homework and other items will be brought to the student to avoid spreading the virus if he or she returns to the classroom.



Superintendent Mike Teahon said the mask will be thrown away as the student leaves the building so parents don’t over-react.

“If some parents see this, they won’t send their kids to school,” Teahon said.

Officials also encourage school-aged children to receive a vaccine for seasonal flu and another for the H1N1 virus.

Immunizations for the seasonal flu will begin next week at the two medical clinics in Gothenburg

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as well as at clinics in Cozad and Lexington.

However the H1N1 vaccine won't be available until at least mid October and will most likely involve a two-dose series for full immunity, Cornwell said.

Others recommended for the flu shots include pregnant women, health-care workers and emergency medical responders, caregivers of infants under six months of age and people aged 25-64 years with underlying medical conditions.

Teahon said the district pays for shots for teachers and staff and at cost for their spouses.

He noted that state officials don't recommend closing school doors until 30% of the population is absent.

That happened in the high school two years ago, he noted, when officials closed school for two days.

"Now we have a good idea how to handle that," Cornwell said.

If afflicted with either flu, she said home is the place to be.

Cornwell and Teahon added that there's much unnecessary hype about the H1N1 virus and people dying from it.

Cornwell pointed out that about 36,000 deaths from seasonal flu occur each year in the United States—much more than from the H1N1 virus.

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Also during the special meeting, the board selected McDermott and Miller of Kearney to do the district's audit for \$4,750 over the next three years.

The firm was the low bidder compared to Alvin Alms of Grand Island and Countryman Associates of Kearney.

Local accountant Joan Windrum had performed the audit for the last several years but decided not to do it anymore.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com 308-537-3636