



Public Health Message

from the Fort Wayne-AlLEN County Department of Health

September 8, 2009

Dear Parent,

Both influenza (flu) and the common cold cause respiratory symptoms, but they are caused by very different viruses. Because the symptoms can appear to be similar, it can be difficult to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. In general, the flu is worse than the common cold, and symptoms such as fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and dry cough are more common and intense with the flu. The most common symptom people experience with a cold is a runny or stuffy nose. Finally, the flu can lead to more serious complications such as pneumonia, dehydration or hospitalizations. However, these complications are more likely to occur in children or the elderly.

It can also be difficult to know when your child should stay at home. Below you will find a list of symptoms that indicate that your child should stay home to facilitate their own recovery and also protect their classmates as they are very likely contagious:

- Fever over 100° F
- Cough that produces yellow or green phlegm
- Sore throat *and* fever
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

Other symptoms that indicate a child should seek medical care and stay home with supervision include persistent, frequent dry cough or shortness of breath, needing to use an inhaler frequently for asthma, lightheadness when standing, confusion, severe headache (especially with fever), or in general if he or she is too ill to participate in classroom activities.

For H1N1 Influenza A (aka swine flu), and a good rule of thumb for all infections, is the child should remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100° F [37.8°C]), or of signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications such as Tylenol or Ibuprofen.

As always, our best “treatment” is prevention! Please make sure you review with your children the importance of simple practices such as:

- Cleaning their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often, especially after coughing and/or sneezing;
- Covering their cough and throwing used tissues in the trash receptacle.

Finally, keep yourself informed about vaccine availability and priority groups. Children, especially those with chronic health conditions, are a top priority. We will continue to keep you informed about the H1N1 vaccine and you can always visit our website: www.fighttheflu.org

Thank you for your cooperation with this important health issue,

Deborah A. McMahan, MD
Health Commissioner