

## Southwest Allen County Schools

# H1N1 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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*Pandemics are fast-moving and information can change quickly. We will keep you as up-to-date as possible as the situation changes.*

### How bad is the current situation?

- Serious. SACS absence rates have never looked like this in recent memory, although they are consistent with what would be expected in a pandemic.
- This is not isolated to SACS. Other school districts are reporting similar attendance statistics.
- While we have not seen any fatalities in Allen County, some communities have suffered loss.

### When will it stop?

- We don't know. Health officials are estimating this wave will last another four weeks.
- A second wave could be seen in the spring, but it is not expected to be as bad because more people will be vaccinated by then.

### Why is the H1N1 flu such a big deal for schools?

- This is a new virus that most people have had NO prior exposure to. That means we have no natural immunity to fight it off. The virus will spread quickly to many people as there is no wall of immunity provided by anyone in the community that would normally stop it.

- This virus picks on kids! We should expect to see high numbers of absences. The most recent statistics tell us that about half of the people sick enough to be hospitalized with severe symptoms are younger than 25 and about a quarter of all deaths were in the same age bracket.
- Hospitalizations and death rates for H1N1 are similar to the statistics for seasonal flu, it is highly unusual to see otherwise healthy young people die from influenza. Generally, 90% of seasonal flu deaths are in elderly patients.

### What should I do if there are students with "confirmed" cases of H1N1 in my classroom/building?

- At this point, doctors are generally telling patients that if they have a fever and a combination of other symptoms including cough, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, body aches or other symptoms, that they likely have the flu. Nearly 100% of influenza cases in the area are H1N1. This is determined by testing done at specific sites, called sentinel sites.
- Confirmed cases are misleading. The reality is there are people with H1N1 throughout the community, and we expect it is in every building.

### Should schools send home notices if they have cases of confirmed H1N1 or for high absences?

- We are distributing and placing on our website information provided by the Fort Wayne-Allen County Department of Health and the CDC.
- We will not be sharing any student's individual health information with other students or parents.
- The goal is to give good information and not to cause panic.

### What are the schools doing to keep children safe?

- SACS is working closely with the Fort Wayne-Allen County Department of Health and are following the recommendations of the CDC.
- We are watching absences closely and reporting to our local Health Department daily.
- The Health Department is evaluating local activity and seeking specific advice from Indiana State Department of Health.
- We have good policies in place for caring for students, including isolating and sending home those who are ill and we need to consistently follow them.

**What should we do to clean our buildings and classrooms?**

- Our current cleaning practices are sufficient for keeping our buildings clean and preventing the spread of illness.
- An environment, such as a classroom, cannot be sterilized. As soon as people return, the work is undone.
- The H1N1 virus lives 8-24 hours on surfaces.

**Should students be wearing masks?**

- Mask use in the schools should be rare and initiated only in specific circumstances.
- Sick students with fever and cough that can not be easily isolated from others while awaiting parent pick up, may be asked to wear a mask as long as it doesn't make them feel short of breath or interfere with normal breathing in any way.
- Most surgical masks are designed to protect others from the wearer...not the other way around.
- There is no recommendation for students or school personnel to wear protective masks in the school/classroom setting.
- There is some scientific evidence that wearing a surgical mask improperly for extended periods of time may actually increase your chances of becoming sick as you are holding germs from the air very close to your face.

**What else should schools be doing?**

- Good personal hygiene, including frequent hand-washing and use of hand sanitizer, and common sense measures, such as making sure children are using drinking fountains appropriately, are the best prevention.
- Students who are sick should be isolated, either by keeping them in the clinic or in another room away from well students.

**Why aren't the schools closing for cases of H1N1?**

- There is no recommendation to do so from the experts.
- No Health Department has shut down an Indiana school.
- There are many factors to consider, including the impact to the community. The students have to go somewhere. If they aren't in school together, they will be in malls and day cares together, which would only shift the situation and could make it worse.

**Should well children stay home from school so he/she is not exposed to the H1N1 virus?**

- Well children should be in school learning.
- Vulnerable children should ask their family doctor for advice.

**Will schools have in-school immunizations programs to give students H1N1 vaccine?**

- So far, the vaccine received by the Health Department has been limited and sporadic.
- When the Health Department receives flu vaccines, there are community clinics established to distribute the vaccine.

**Who is getting vaccine now and where can it be obtained?**

- Priority groups have been established because at this point there is a limited supply of the vaccine.
- The Health Department controls all doses coming in and is vaccinating children, pregnant women and health care providers first. Care givers of children less than 6 months of age are also eligible.
- When additional vaccines are received, and the at-risk groups have been covered, immunizations may be provided to those less at risk for serious complications.
- Daily updates of vaccine clinic sites and hours are available at [www.fighttheflu.org](http://www.fighttheflu.org)

