

## Every Student...



### Watervliet City Schools Frequently asked questions about the H1N1 virus October 23, 2009

**Q.** Do we have any confirmed cases of H1N1 in our schools?

**A.** The district is unaware of any *confirmed cases*, which we consider “*lab-tested*” or “*lab confirmed*” test results that indicate a positive test.

According to our school physician Dr. O’Brien and the Albany County Health Department, very few cases are being tested. All local testing to verify if a specimen is H1N1 positive is done at Wadsworth Labs in Albany. The only providers who are authorized to send specimens there are ‘sentinel’ providers [these providers are doctors who are part of a network of physicians who report cases of influenza-like illness to the CDC]. They send a limited number to the lab each week.

Just to stress how few samples are actually getting tested, According to the weekly H1N1 update issued by the Albany County Health Department, The University at Albany which is a sentinel provider serving 18,000 students, is submitting only 2 specimens per week for testing.

The assumption at the this time is that most of the influenza like illness we are seeing in the Capital Region at this time is probably H1N1

**Q.** Will the district be notifying parents if we do receive word that we have a lab-confirmed case?

**A.** For the reasons listed above, the likelihood that we will receive lab-tested confirmation on a case of H1N1 is pretty small. Instead of focusing on whether or not we are letting parents know about a single illness in a particular classroom, we are looking at the bigger picture. We’re watching for clusters of students who may be ill—for instance, a number of students on one sports team or in one classroom. If clusters are identified, we may choose to notify parents so they can keep a closer watch on their children and help us further reinforce flu prevention techniques with those affected.

**Q.** I’ve heard that 80 children were out at WES. Is the district seeing drastic increases in the numbers of absent students?

**A.** We are monitoring our absentee rates daily, and voluntarily reporting them to the Albany County Health Department on a weekly basis. On any given day, when widespread illness like the flu isn’t a factor, our district operates at

about a 95% attendance rate. Over the past week we have seen that rate fall to from anywhere between 89% and 95 % on any given day.

We are also analyzing our absentee rates against historical data... for example, last Wednesday, our attendance rate dipped to its lowest point yet, which was initially worrisome. But once we examined historical data we saw that this dip was NOT due to illness, but was probably attributable to the fact that our schools were having a half-day that day.

We are also carefully monitoring the attendance rates of faculty and staff to ensure that we have adequate staff on hand to deliver our educational program. As of now we have not seen significant increases in faculty and staff absentee rates. We are encouraging our staff to stay home if they exhibit flu-like symptoms.

**Q. What precautions is the district taking to help keep students safe?**

**A.** We want assure you that we are monitoring the situation in our schools and will continue to work closely with our school physician, school nurses and the local health departments to provide the safest learning environment for our students. We are mindful of the fact that flu season has started earlier than usual, and younger age groups seem to be impacted at higher rates. With that being the case, district staff continue to encourage students to use strategies to prevent flu illnesses. We have flu-prevention posters in all of our buildings and extensive resources available on our website.

For example, Elementary School students are given time throughout the day, and before eating, to wash their hands thoroughly. Washing hands with soap and water is still considered the most effective way to kill germs.

Jr.-Sr. High School students are provided similar opportunities for hand-washing. In the near future, alcohol-free hand sanitizer dispensers will be available in our Jr.-Sr. High School cafeteria so students who don't have an opportunity to wash their hands in a restroom are able to clean their hands before eating.

Other flu prevention strategies are centered on the facilities. Our maintenance staff continues its daily routine of sanitizing all parts of our buildings according to standards set forth by local and state health departments, which includes all high-touch areas such as desktops and door handles. Starting this week our bus drivers will be sanitizing all surfaces of the bus after each run.

**Q. What advice do you have for parents of children in high risk categories?**

**A.** Children considered at High Risk for complications from H1N1 include students with diabetes, asthma, compromised immune systems and certain other underlying health conditions.

My first recommendation would be for parents with children who fall into the high risk category to contact their child's pediatrician or other medical specialists involved in their child's care. See what they recommend. I have spoken with our school physician and he echoes this sentiment and also urges that these parents keep an extra close eye on their child.

**Q. How can parents determine if their child should stay home?**

**A.** We've talked a lot about this but let me reiterate:  
Stay home if you are sick or if you have flu-like symptoms which are:  
Fever combined with

- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Headache
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Sometimes diarrhea and vomiting

**Q. How long should a child stay home?**

**A.** The CDC recommends that sick people stay home for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone except to get medical care. Fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine, such as Tylenol or ibuprofen.

**Q. Will our schools be used as a vaccination site?**

**A.** The district has been approached by the Albany County Department of Health to look at WES as a location that could possibly serve as a vaccination point of distribution (POD) sometime in November, not just for students but for the whole community. Clinics would take place after school hours, possibly on a weekday evening or weekend.

As of now, no details have been finalized. We have been assured that if we are not selected as a site, either Cohoes or Green Island will be selected so there will be an easily accessible location for our families to go. Parents should consult their family physician with regard to receiving an H1N1 vaccination at this time.

**Q. Are there any plans to close our schools due to the H1N1 virus?**

**A.** At this time the federal government and the New York State Department of Education are NOT recommending that we close schools do to flu-like illness. We feel it is important that our schools remain open to provide the education and the services that all of our students need. It our mission to provide for every student, every day.

**Q. Do you think there will come a time in the future when you will have to close the schools?**

**A.** We're not sure if there will come a time when we will need to close or not. If we found that there was situation where we were no longer able to provide the services our students need, not only educationally, but health and safety, shelter, food, etc., then we would have to make a decision, in conjunction with the New York State Education Department and the Albany County Department of health on the best way to move forward.

**Q. How are district administrators planning to keep parents and the community informed of the status of the H1N1 situation in our schools?**

**A.** We ask parents to go to our website and we will continue to send home letters on a regular basis as needed. The best source of information on H1N1 is our website which is updated almost daily.