



PUTNAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

1 Geneva Road, Brewster, New York 10509

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR PARENTS ON THE UPCOMING 2009/2010 FLU SEASON

What is the difference between the seasonal flu and the novel H1N1 flu (Swine flu)?

Seasonal Flu is the typical annual flu that usually appears in the fall or winter resulting in a contagious respiratory illness. The strains of influenza causing seasonal flu generally vary from year to year, and have circulated among our population in the past. The traditional flu vaccine protects against the three main flu strains that research indicates will cause the most illness during the upcoming flu season. The vaccine for this year's seasonal flu is available and clinics are currently being scheduled.

The *H1N1 flu*, a newly identified virus strain which was first seen in the U.S. in the spring of this year, continues to cause illness in people worldwide. It was first called the *Swine flu*, but it is not spread by touching pigs or eating pork. We are expecting *H1N1 flu* cases at the same time as *Seasonal flu* cases. **The traditional seasonal flu vaccine is not protective against this new H1N1 type of influenza.** An *H1N1 flu* vaccine is currently being developed but will most likely not be available until late fall. This means this year you will need a vaccination for seasonal flu and certain priority groups will also need a vaccination for H1N1 flu. These vaccines will not be combined. (See www.flu.gov for specific information.)

What are the symptoms of the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu?

The symptoms of *novel H1N1 flu* are similar to the symptoms of typical *seasonal flu* and include fever (over 100°F or 37.8°C) cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people with *H1N1 flu* have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Although most cases of flu are mild, both types of flu can lead to severe illness, hospitalization and even death.

Which students and staff are at higher risk for complications from the flu?

Even healthy people can get the flu and serious problems from the flu can happen at any age. However, children younger than 5 years old, pregnant women, those 65 and older and anyone with chronic medical conditions such as asthma, heart disease, diabetes, and neurological illnesses are more likely to experience complications from the typical seasonal flu. (Those 65 and older have experienced fewer complications from the new H1N1 flu.)

What can a parent do to protect themselves and children from getting sick?

- Follow the recommendations of the CDC and your physician by getting yourself and your child vaccinated against *seasonal flu* and the *novel H1N1 flu* when the vaccines are available.
- Remember that flu spreads easily. Students who get sick with flu can spread flu to others.
- If your child has flu-like symptoms, keep your child home, call your physician, and follow the physician's recommendations. REMEMBER, when you call the school due to a child's illness, please let them know the symptoms; fever, cough, etc.
- If your child becomes ill in school, expect to receive a call from the school nurse to pick up your child as soon as possible.
- Anyone with fever and/or flu-like illness should stay home for at **least 24 hours** after the fever ends before returning to school/work. Fever should be less than 100°F without taking fever-reducing medications such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol).
- Teach your child good cough and hand hygiene etiquette: cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or cough and sneeze into the inside of the elbow, discard used tissues and remember to wash your hands.
- Make sure your child's hands are washed for 20 seconds with soap and water. Set a good example by doing this yourself. (Sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice).
- If hands are not visibly soiled, using hand sanitizers containing at least 60 percent alcohol are also effective. (Monitor little children who may ingest gel sanitizers.)
- Follow the guidance of your school administration and your school nurses who will be working closely with the state and local health departments.

Call the Putnam County Department of Health Hotline (845)278-6130 or visit www.putnamcountyny.com for scheduled flu clinics and updates. Visit www.flu.gov for influenza information (available in English and Spanish).