

Centralia School District

H1N1 Flu Update: October 22, 2009

Prepared by John Bash, Assistant Superintendent

Our school district continues to cooperate with the Lewis County Public Health Department regarding H1N1 influenza and is preparing for school-based vaccinations with their guidance. The following is a “frequently asked questions” update we have prepared based upon consultation with the health department regarding H1N1 inquiries from students, parents, staff and the media.

Q - Has the school had any confirmed cases of H1N1 and will they notify parents if/when they do?

As of October 22, 2009, the school district has received no communication from physicians or the health department of any lab-confirmed cases of H1N1 among students or staff. The health department has advised us that most health care providers utilize a flu screening that tests for Influenza A and B only. The H1N1 influenza and seasonal influenza are both considered Influenza A. Therefore, a positive test result using this screening method can only be declared “Influenza A” which may or may not be H1N1. There are at least twelve other viruses that can cause flu-like symptoms. Regardless of the type of flu, the health department indicates treatment strategies are essentially the same for any flu including rest, extra fluids, fever reducing medicines, cough suppressants, etc. We were told that the state lab conducts testing for H1N1 and these tests are currently limited to those patients with serious respiratory issues requiring hospitalization. Flu and cold season consistently affects families in our school district each year. We will not be notifying all parents of individual influenza cases in a school. H1N1 cases in our schools which are confirmed through the state lab and require hospitalization will be reported to public health, parents and staff.

Q – Will schools be closed due to H1N1?

School closure decisions will be made in consultation with the Lewis County Public Health Department based upon the circumstances for each school and situation. If closing a school is deemed necessary to protect public health interests by our public health officials, we will close schools and take other necessary actions to respond to the situation. We report school absentee rates to the health department when they exceed 10-12% and also provide information regarding the reasons for these absences which not only include flu, but also include routine absenteeism for a range of reasons such as dentist appointments and cases of head lice. Should our absentee rate result in a public health concern, we will take necessary precautions and communicate this to parents.

Q – Where can I get my child vaccinated for H1N1?

The health department is encouraging the public to seek the H1N1 vaccination through their health care providers. We are learning that currently some providers have the vaccine, others are waiting for their supply, and some are not planning to receive any. The health department requests that school-based vaccinations only be accessed after attempting to first obtain the vaccine through the family health care provider. Planning for school-based vaccination clinics is currently underway for our county. The health department reports that they

plan to start vaccinations in schools the third week in November, with smaller school districts scheduled first and Centralia and Chehalis sometime in December. They are planning to serve one or two schools before Thanksgiving break. After Thanksgiving, they are looking at vaccinating nearly every day before Christmas break. This plan is tentative and will depend on a sufficient supply of the vaccine and ample qualified personnel to administer and support the clinics which they are working to secure now.

Q – Are there any rules or restrictions for the school-based vaccinations?

Yes. The health department will be providing each school district with a letter and a required parental consent form to send home prior to the vaccination clinics. These forms will be sent home with students in grades K-6 and will be mailed home for students in grades 7-12. Copies of the form will also be posted on the school district website www.centralia.wednet.edu. The consent form must be completed and returned to school prior to the clinic date. Students with missing or incomplete forms will not receive a vaccination. These consent forms will include a section requesting information from parents regarding existing medical conditions for each child. The health department indicates that there are some health conditions that will disqualify students from participating in the vaccination clinic at school and we understand that this information will be included in the notice to parents. Parents of these students will be advised to obtain the vaccination from their health care provider. The school-based clinics are for Kindergarten through 12th grade enrolled students in attendance on the day of the clinic only. Parents and siblings who are not enrolled students at the school should obtain the vaccinations through a health care provider.

Q – Who will give my child the vaccination and how will this occur?

Qualified medical staff and licensed nurse volunteers will administer the vaccination. We recently learned that all vaccinations will be administered by injection. No nasal spray method will be available for school-based clinics. Schools are striving for private spaces for the vaccinations as well as staging areas for student groups adjacent to vaccination spaces. Due to facility limitations in some schools, a private injection may not be possible.

Q – Can parents be present with their children when they receive the vaccination?

At our K-3 schools, it is anticipated that some of our younger students will be anxious or upset about receiving the vaccination. Parents of K-3 students will be asked to indicate whether or not they will be attending the clinic on their consent forms so school staff can organize for this on the day of the clinic.

Q – How can I find out more about H1N1, vaccinations, and school information related to H1N1?

The school district will continue to post information for parents at the district website, in school and district newsletters, and in special parent letters. Notices regarding school-based vaccinations will be sent home with consent forms as soon as the district receives these from the health department. Information about H1N1 can be found on the internet and in the news through several sources. The Lewis County Public Health Department provides H1N1 information for parents and caregivers at the following website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/parents/> .