

Influenza-Like Illness in Broadalbin-Perth

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is it true that Broadalbin-Perth has confirmed cases of the H1N1 virus in its schools?

A: No, we have not had any laboratory-confirmed cases of the H1N1 virus. However, we have had a number of students with influenza-like illnesses. As many physicians are no longer testing specifically for the H1N1 virus in ill patients (unless that individual is hospitalized or has an underlying medical condition), the term “influenza-like illness” is now being used by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and state health departments to cover all types of flu.

Influenza-like illness can be caused by the H1N1 influenza virus, the seasonal influenza virus or other respiratory infections. However, national surveillance data has shown that the vast majority of influenza-like illness circulating in the United States at this time is H1N1 influenza. It is important to note that most people infected with the H1N1 flu virus have experienced mild to moderate illness, similar to seasonal flu.

Q: Will the district be notifying parents of confirmed H1N1 cases/influenza-like illnesses as they are determined?

A: No, the district is not in a position to notify parents every time a student has an influenza-like illness. As stated above, many individuals exhibiting influenza-like illnesses are not being tested for the H1N1 virus at this time so it would be extremely difficult – if not impossible – to disseminate accurate information on “confirmed cases” throughout the coming weeks.

Prevention and treatment for the H1N1 flu virus is generally the same as for the seasonal flu, and so distinguishing between the two for the purposes of stopping the spread of illness is not necessarily relevant.

Q: There seems to be a lot of students absent from school. Will schools be closed to help prevent the spread of influenza-like illness?

A: As expected, we are starting to see cases of influenza-like illness at all of our schools. Consequently, some school buildings are seeing higher absenteeism than is typical for late-October. Please keep in mind that it is not uncommon to experience student absences at this time of year because of this type of illness.

We believe the high absenteeism is also because of the fact that our school nurses are sending more children home during the day when they have flu-like symptoms, and the fact that more parents are keeping their children home at the first sign of illness – for which we thank you. That is exactly what health authorities are asking everyone to do to help prevent the spread of both colds and influenza-like illness.

There have been some rumors circulating throughout the district that school will close because of the number of influenza-like cases. To clarify, at this time, we are not experiencing numbers of absences that would prompt school closings.

As a district, we must balance the risk of flu in our buildings with the disruption that school dismissals will cause in education and in the wider community.

Q: At what point will schools be closed?

A: There is no “specific number” that will be used to determine if and when schools should be closed. Any future decisions on school closings because of an outbreak of influenza-like illness will be made in partnership with local and state health officials.

We are continuing to monitor our absences and will keep you informed if closings are necessary. In the event that school needs to be closed, the district will use the normal emergency notification channels – ConnectED phone calls, the district Web site, and local media outlets.

Q: How is the district monitoring the occurrence of influenza-like illnesses?

A: The district has been monitoring and reporting its student attendance at school on a daily basis as requested by the New York State and Fulton County Departments of Health as part of the 2009 H1N1 influenza response plan.

The district has been and remains in communication with local health officials, as well as with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in an effort to provide the most current information regarding influenza-like illnesses to our school community.

In addition, the district is asking all parents who report a child absent because of illness to please specify whether their child has been diagnosed with the flu by a family physician or if the child is experiencing flu-like symptoms. Flu-like symptoms include:

- Fever (more than 100 degrees F)

- Sore throat
- Cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches
- Chills and/or shivering
- Nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea

Please know that providing this information is completely voluntary but will greatly assist school nurses and main office staff at each of our seven buildings to better monitor the cases of influenza-like illnesses within our schools.

As a reminder, students and staff members who experience any flu-like illness should remain at home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever or signs of a fever (without the use of fever-reducing medication).

Q: Will the district be offering any sort of vaccination program?

A: The district has been approached by the Fulton County Department of Health to possibly serve as a vaccination point of distribution (POD) sometime in November. However, as of this posting, no details have been finalized. Parents should consult their family physician with regard to receiving an H1N1 vaccination at this time.

Q: What is the district doing to prevent the spread of illness?

A: Please be assured that the district is making a significant effort to increase preparedness and prevention in light of the potential increased occurrence of influenza-like illnesses in our school community throughout the coming weeks.

Working with information provided by local and state health officials, the district recently added an extensive page to its Web site regarding the H1N1 virus and influenza like illness. [Please add a link to the H1N1 home page here.] The page includes important information and resources for students, parents and staff. We encourage you to visit the page often for the latest news and information regarding influenza-like illnesses in our school community. As we look ahead, education regarding symptom identification and the importance of proper hygiene will be the key to curbing the spread of illness.

In addition to our expanded Web coverage, posters have been placed in all school building entrance ways alerting students, parents and staff members to the fact that they should not enter the school building if they are displaying flu-like symptoms.

Within our school buildings, the district's maintenance personnel have continued to be vigilant with their daily cleaning efforts. Guidelines released by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) state that the regular cleaning procedures being followed by the district are sufficient to help stop the spread of the virus – bleaching and other harsh disinfectants are not necessary. Areas of shared occupancy, though, have been paid additional attention. These areas include, but are not limited to, libraries, main offices, resource rooms and computer classrooms.

Q: What can students and parents do to help prevent the spread of influenza-like illness?

A: To help stop the spread of illness, parents are encouraged to teach their children how to reduce their risk of getting the flu and protect others from infection:

- Teach your children to wash their hands often. Washing with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds is ideal. That's about as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.
- Teach your children to keep their hands away from their face and avoid touching their mouth, nose or eyes.
- Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of their elbows. Cough or sneeze into your sleeve – not your hands!