



News Release

Arkansas Department of Health

**For More Information Contact:
ADH Office of Communications
Ed Barham, 501-280-4147**

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Back to School with the Flu?

(LITTLE ROCK) — Public school and kindergarten administrators are seeing something very unusual in their schools as the children come back to school—the flu. Illness caused by the new H1N1 influenza A virus, commonly known as “Swine Flu” is being reported. An outbreak of flu is very uncommon in August, but officials at the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) are urging parents and teachers to be alert, and not alarmed.

According to James Phillips, M.D., Chief of the Infectious Disease Branch at ADH, this is just what had been expected.

“We saw this happening all summer long, at summer camps and other group outings, so we were sure that we would see many cases when school started,” Phillips said. “More people are at risk for getting sick because it’s a new strain of virus. The good news is that it is relatively mild for now, and isn’t causing lots of severe illness. We are responding as if it were the seasonal flu—it’s just happening in August instead of the fall and winter when we usually see it.”

Parents are being urged to monitor their children carefully for signs and symptoms of the flu and keep them home until they are well. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is not recommending that schools be closed right now, because that will not be an effective way to contain the virus at this point. Schools are being asked to make special accommodations for the absences that are certain to occur, so that the disruption of the school year can be held to a minimum.

Signs and symptoms of the flu are:

- Fever of more than 100 degrees F
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches
- Headaches
- Vomiting, nausea and diarrhea

Right now, the best thing to do is teach your children the importance of hand washing,” Phillips continued. “Warm soapy water is best, and an alcohol-based hand sanitizer is also a good idea. Children can also be taught to stay away from other kids who are ill, so that they don’t catch the flu, and to cover their mouths and noses with a tissue when they sneeze or cough. ”

A child may return to school once fever is gone for 24 hours without the help of fever-reducing medicine like acetaminophen or ibuprofen (children under 19 years of age should not be treated for fever with aspirin because of the risk of Reyes syndrome.)

The ADH will be conducting mass vaccination clinics for seasonal flu in the fall. All Arkansans are encouraged to get their seasonal flu shots every year. Additionally, the federal government is working with vaccine manufacturers to develop a vaccine for H1N1 influenza. When that vaccine is delivered to Arkansas, the Health Department will make those flu shots available. Additionally, as part of Governor Mike Beebe’s health initiative and with funding provided by the federal government and the tobacco tax passed during the recent legislative session, the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH), the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) and local school districts statewide are offering the seasonal flu shot to school children in grades K-12 beginning in mid October.

For more information on the new H1N1 influenza A virus, visit www.healthyarkansas.com or www.flu.gov .

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