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www.grpublicschools.org

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Dear GRPS Staff:

As we begin the school year, I want to take this opportunity to share with you information about the H1N1 flu (swine flu) and the proactive steps we are taking to prevent the spread of flu in our schools.

The flu season is starting and will last through the fall and winter. More than one kind of flu virus will be spreading this season, including seasonal flu and the 2009 H1N1 flu. Obviously, the flu can spread to others at home, at work, and in the community. Symptoms of flu include fever or chills and cough or sore throat. In addition, symptoms of flu can include runny nose, body aches, headache, tiredness, diarrhea, or vomiting.

If you have these symptoms, contact your primary care doctor. Your doctor can provide you the best medical advice and may even prescribe medications if you are seen early in the illness. We also encourage you to stay at home and avoid crowds at the malls, grocery store, and other public areas to protect you and others from getting sick.

We are asking that you plan to stay home if you are sick until at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius) or signs of a fever (have chills, feel very warm, have a flushed appearance, or are sweating). This should be determined without the use of fever-reducing medicines (any medicine that contains ibuprofen or acetaminophen).

We also request that you follow the call in procedures for your building, program or department, including utilizing the AESOP system if you're a classroom teacher. If you become seriously ill and need to be off work for longer than three days, we require that you apply for a leave of absence. The leave of absence forms and process are posted on the Human Resources page of the Grand Rapids Public Schools website.

Also remember to cover your coughs and sneezes and wash your hands often with soap and water. Use an alcohol-based hand cleaner if soap and water are not available. If a severe flu outbreak hits our community, we will take additional steps to avoid spreading the flu virus in the workplace.

You need to prepare as well.

- Get the vaccine for seasonal flu. *As of today, the District has not received notification that we will have access to coordinate a flu shot program this year. As soon as we receive any information we will share it with you. In the meantime, if you receive the flu shot, please check first with your insurance provider to see if the flu shot is covered and then check your contract/employee manual regarding our reimbursement process for payment, if you do not have insurance coverage.*

- Get the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine when it becomes available, **if** you are at higher risk for 2009 H1N1 flu complications. People at higher risk for 2009 H1N1 flu complications include pregnant women and people with chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, heart disease, or diabetes). For more information about priority groups for vaccination, visit www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/acip.htm.
- Make plans to care for sick household members or for children if schools dismiss students or child care programs close.
- Be prepared in case you get sick and need to stay home. Have the following items on hand: a supply of fever-reducing medicines that contain acetaminophen or ibuprofen, alcohol-based hand cleaners, tissues, and other items that may be useful and help avoid the need to make trips out in public while you are sick.

As part of the district's preparation, we are stocking additional supplies including hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes as well as ensuring adequate supplies of hand soap, paper towels and tissue. Portable hand sanitizers will also be installed in cafeterias.

In addition, we are working with our custodial staff to enhance cleaning protocols; incorporating disinfecting door knobs, handles, and drinking fountains into routine schedules. Desks will also be cleaned on a periodic basis.

We recognize that you may want to personally ensure your work area is cleaned and therefore you may feel compelled to bring in cleaning materials from home. As you know, we are required to have MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheets) on file for every cleaner used in the district. As such, you must consult the list of approved materials before bringing any of your personal supplies in. Chlorox or Lysol disinfecting wipes are permissible.

We have posted information about the H1N1 flu on our district website at www.grpublicschools.org. To find out more about preparing for the flu, you may also want to visit www.flu.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636).

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call Human Resources at 819-2031. Please look for additional information. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Bernard Taylor, Jr., Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools