

## Swine Flu (H1N1) Press Release

As the Director of Claiborne County Schools I would like to ask you, the parents, teachers, students, staff, bus drivers, cooks, janitors, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and all the citizens of Claiborne County, to join the Claiborne County Board of Education and the team put together by the State of Tennessee, which includes your public health officials, doctors, and hospitals, in the coming school months to make sure that our children have a healthy environment in which to learn.

A vaccine against the flu is under development. We are making plans to acquire the vaccine and to give it to any student who has parental permission.

One of the first things that you might ask is: How dangerous is the swine flu? The public health officials and doctors that I have talked with say it looks very much like seasonal flu so far. The Health and Human Services secretary, Kathleen Sebelius, said earlier this month that most people suffer unpleasant but not life-threatening symptoms such as fever, body aches, sore throat and runny nose. Vomiting and diarrhea are normally rare for adults with flu.

Many people do not even develop a fever, though they had other symptoms, says Richard Wenzel, chairman of the Department of Internal Medicine at Virginia Commonwealth University's Medical College, who observed such cases on trips to Latin America. He states that swine flu can have fever, some had only a runny nose, and some had headaches.

One unusual thing, young people are getting sick, while the elderly, who normally account for 90% of serious incidents from flu, have largely been spared. The reason is that many officials believe that people over 60 may have immunity is due to exposure during an outbreak of the H1N1 viruses between 1918 through 1957.

Our school officials and public health officials are monitoring the situation closely. Our school nurses are monitoring it closely as well as our principals and our teachers.

You may ask: Who is most at risk? Pregnant women, people with asthma, diabetes, heart disease or any other chronic disease. How do you know if you have swine flu? You cannot know for sure if you have the new H1N1 flu unless you get a test. Rapid flu tests have not proven reliable, only a lab test can confirm whether you have it or not.

The Health Department will notify us if any such incidents occur. You treat this flu much as you would any other seasonal flu. Most people get well by resting, staying hydrated and taking medicines to reduce fever. You need to stay home and keep your distance from others for 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of fever reducing medicines.

Children under 18 years old should not be given aspirin due to a risk of Reye's Syndrome, a rare but potentially life-threatening illness. Do not give cold medicines to children under 4 without first talking with a doctor.

You should call the doctor if you have trouble breathing, chest or abdominal pain, dizziness, confusion or persistent vomiting, or if your symptoms worsen after improving. Call the doctor if your child has these symptoms, isn't drinking enough fluids, or is irritable or sluggish.

At the present time, Claiborne County Board of Education is preparing for the virus by offering, when available, the regular flu mist to students through Cherokee Health Systems and the H1N1(Swine Flu) vaccination to all students through the Claiborne Health Department. Further information will be disseminated to parents as vaccines become available. The Claiborne County Board of Education has also purchased foggers that kill flu bacteria, staph infection, and mold. The foggers will be used in all the Claiborne County schools and on the buses.

Is the vaccine safe? The government and vaccine manufacturers have conducted tests to determine if the new flu vaccine is safe and effective and how large a dose is needed. Results are expected sometime in October. How can you protect yourself until you get the vaccine? Wash your hands often with soap and water, or use hand sanitizer, avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. The virus spreads through respiratory droplets in a cough or sneeze, and people start spreading the virus a day before they develop symptoms. You can pick it up by touching something that has flu virus on it, then touching your mouth or nose.

If swine flu is going around your child's school, should you keep him or her home? No. We are following the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control (CDC) which states that schools monitor closely for ill children and staff, isolate them quickly and send them home, but remain open for classes.

Children spread infections easily to one another because they excrete viruses in greater amounts than adults and for longer periods. Each school in Claiborne County is taking steps to curb the spread of diseases by making sure paper towel and soap dispensers are well stocked in bathrooms. We are also following the CDC recommendations for cleaning high traffic areas in the schools. Please urge your child to wash their hands often or use hand sanitizer and to cough into their elbow or a tissue to prevent viruses from spreading.

We are urging schools to keep ill students home, move desks apart and take any other steps recommended by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to minimize the spread of the virus if it grows more severe.