

THE BERKELEY SCHOOL

October 9, 2009

Dear TBS parents,

As we progress in the school year, it's a good time to check in with the community about the H1N1 flu. As you are probably aware, the H1N1 flu did not take the summer hiatus normal to seasonal influenza viruses, and now that schools are back in session, incidences are increasing. Although so far the virus has been no more dangerous than a seasonal flu, it is disproportionately affecting healthy young people, not the elderly and infants, where seasonal flu normally hits hardest. For this reason, as well as the potential of the virus to mutate suddenly, we are carefully monitoring news reports and are prepared to move quickly if the illness should increase in severity. Our goal, as it has been since this virus became an issue last spring, is to pay close attention to developments, have plans in place should the situation change, and not panic about the unknowns.

Here are some FAQs about the H1N1 flu:

Q. What's the best way to protect my child from the flu?

- A. The single best way to protect yourself from the H1N1 flu and other illnesses is to be diligent about hand-washing, and to be sure your child is, too. It's also important to teach children to avoid touching their mouths and noses with their hands. At TBS, all the classrooms, and most offices, are equipped with alcohol-free hand sanitizer. (We understand that alcohol-based sanitizers are often recommended on the basis of efficacy, but there have been a few isolated cases of alcohol poisoning among very young children, and we have located an effective sanitizer that doesn't contain alcohol.) The teachers will remind children to wash their hands and use the sanitizer, but parents should talk at more length with their children at home about why this is so important.

Paying close attention to your and your child's general health is important, as well. Eating less sugar and more fruits and vegetables, trying to minimize stress in your family's life, and (especially) getting plenty of sleep will all pay dividends.

The decision about whether or not to vaccinate a child is one best left to parents, in consultation with their health care practitioners.

Q. What should I do if my child gets sick?

- A. If your child is sick, keep him or her at home. We realize that most parents do not, and should not, keep a child home at every hint of a sniffle, but if your child has a temperature, is clearly not him- or herself, or has other flu symptoms like a sore throat or body aches, do not send him or her to school. A child should remain at home until his or her temperature has been normal (without fever-reducing medication) for 24 hours.

Q. When should my child see a doctor?

- A. The guidelines for when a sick child should see a health care practitioner are the same for H1N1 as for other respiratory illnesses. Seek immediate medical help if your child:
- is breathing very quickly or having trouble breathing;
 - has a bluish skin color;
 - is becoming obviously dehydrated;
 - is extremely sleepy or lethargic; or
 - has fever with a rash.

Q. Will you close the school if there is an outbreak of H1N1 flu?

- A. As you probably know, doctors and hospitals are no longer testing specifically for the H1N1 virus in most cases, so diagnosis is usually probable, not definitive. Nevertheless, TBS, like most schools, has already had several probable cases of H1N1; all affected individuals recovered or are recovering without incident. Schools are not closing, nor are they being advised to close by health authorities, because of suspected or confirmed cases of H1N1; at this time, the only circumstance under which we would close the school would be if we had so many absent teachers or students that it was impracticable to run a program.

Q. Is it safe to eat pork?

- A. Yes. H1N1 has not been shown to be transmissible to people through eating properly handled and prepared pork (pig meat) or other products derived from pigs. The virus is killed by cooking temperatures of 160°F/70°C, the general guideline for preparing pork.

The CDC website is a good source for more information. See <http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu/qa.htm> for more FAQs.

Please contact us if you have any questions about this letter or TBS' H1N1 policy.

Best,



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