


Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

October 5, 2009

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools 

Subject: Update on Seasonal and H1N1 Flu

The following is an update on the seasonal flu vaccination program in schools and information on H1N1 flu planning.

Since the early part of the summer, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) senior leadership has been meeting with staff from the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to plan for the potential outbreak of the H1N1 flu virus. Schools were required to add to their emergency/crisis plans a contingency plan that ensured the continuation of the instructional program if student and staff absences required a disruption to the normal school program or the closing of the school building. Details regarding communication with school personnel, students, and parents, as well as payroll, food services, and other operational functions are included in these plans. In addition, central services staff provided resources for the contingency planning, including sample letters and Connect-ED messages, all translated in multiple languages.

In addition, masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, tissues, and other items have been stocked in the MCPS warehouse for schools and offices to order as needed. Frequent communications have been provided to students, staff, and parents (in multiple languages) regarding the recommended steps to prevent the spread of flu and to ensure good hygiene. In addition, the MCPS website is updated regularly with flu-related developments, reminders, and resources. Information also is posted on *myMCPS* for easy access.

Flu Vaccination Programs

In collaboration with MCPS, DHHS developed a plan to offer free seasonal flu vaccinations to elementary-aged children in all elementary schools. The seasonal flu vaccination program began on September 23, 2009. Consent forms and informational material in multiple languages were sent home during the first week of school. Approximately 48 percent of elementary school students returned consent forms. DHHS staff reviewed every form to determine whether the student should receive the vaccination via nasal spray or injection.

One week after the vaccination program began, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) informed state and local health officials that the H1N1 flu was more prevalent than the seasonal flu. Consequently, manufacturers were directed to accelerate production and focus energies on producing H1N1 flu vaccine. This led to a slowing of the delivery of seasonal flu vaccine to state and county health departments. Because of an insufficient supply of seasonal flu vaccine, several of the vaccination clinics scheduled in elementary schools had to be cancelled on short notice. On October 5, 2009, DHHS announced the suspension of the remaining 56 school-based seasonal flu clinics in our elementary schools until further notice. DHHS did complete administration of the seasonal flu vaccine in 75 schools prior to today. This decision was made primarily due to the lack of available seasonal flu vaccine and the potential impact on delaying the administration of the H1N1 FluMist vaccine, which requires a minimum 28-day waiting period between the administration of the seasonal FluMist vaccine and the H1N1 FluMist vaccine.

Although the in-school seasonal flu vaccination program has been suspended, DHHS directed that pre-K and Head Start students at the remaining schools receive seasonal flu vaccine on October 6, 2009 during the school day. Both MCPS and DHHS staff provided additional communication and outreach to the parents of these preschool students.

Since the inception of the school-based flu clinics on September 23, 2009, principals of the affected schools were provided with letters and Connect-ED messages in multiple languages to send to parents. The flexibility of school and county health department staff, as well as parent and community volunteers, has been instrumental during this ever-changing ongoing endeavor to provide current information about the flu and good hygiene practices, and to execute a plan to vaccinate as many of our children as possible in order to minimize the spread of the influenza virus.

MCPS has been informed that Maryland health officials anticipate the first shipment of H1N1 vaccine to arrive in mid-October, and DHHS is making every effort to make the vaccine available as soon as it is received. An alternative to the H1N1 nasal spray is the H1N1 injection, which does not require a 28-day waiting period after the administration of the seasonal nasal spray. DHHS anticipates offering both forms of the H1N1 vaccine at sites throughout the county once it has arrived.

I will continue to keep you updated as additional information becomes available. If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Larry Bowers, chief operating officer, at 301-279-3626.

JDW:rlc

Copy to:

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