

April 30, 2009

Dear Parents:

I am sure you have heard about the threat of swine flu infections which is being talked about so much in the media. Please know that although we are concerned with news reports, we are not alarmed. There is no reason to believe that our students and staff are in imminent danger of this illness.

Understandably, I've received many questions from concerned parents who want reassurance that our school system is aware of the seriousness of the illness and its possible impact on school operations. Our system's Student Health Services Department is knowledgeable of the national and worldwide situation and is in close contact with the Fulton County Department of Health and Wellness, which monitors reports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as well as other health and emergency agencies. Our superintendent is in touch with them frequently for updates and also have been conferring with our school system's Environmental Services staff to be sure that we are doing everything possible to prevent the spread of any infectious illness.

It's helpful if we all have a common understanding of what this illness is – and what it is not. As you may have read or heard, swine flu is a respiratory disease of pigs that can cause outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections do sometimes occur. Symptoms of swine flu are similar to the regular flu (fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fever) and like other types of flu, it is spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing. There is no evidence that swine flu viruses are transmitted by food and you cannot get swine flu from eating cooked pork or pork products.

According to health experts, antiviral medications are being given to treat and in some cases, prevent, swine flu infection, and as with most types of flu viruses, the elderly, young children and those with compromised immune systems are more at risk. Swine flu has become such a hot topic in the news not just because of its effect on these groups, but due to the growing number of cases in persons 17-74 years.

Health experts also advise us that prevention is our best intervention when combating the spread of any illness, whether it is the common cold or something more serious. The following are some helpful precautionary measures that can help you and others stay healthy:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners/hand sanitizers are also effective.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, and throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- Keep sick children at home until their illness has run its course.

We will make sure our school restrooms are properly stocked with hand-washing supplies. We also are encouraging our students – as well as our staff – to wash hands often and to properly dispose of used tissues. And as with any communicable illness, sick students and staff are advised to seek medical care when they are experiencing serious or unusual health symptoms.

The Fulton County School System will continue to monitor reports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. On the school system's web site, [www.fultonschools.org](http://www.fultonschools.org), you will find information about this illness, its treatment and prevention.