

**MONTESSORI COMMUNITY SCHOOL
IMPORTANT HEALTH INFORMATION**

September 4, 2009

Dear MCS Parents,

Our school has been monitoring the H1N1 flu (swine flu) through the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the State of Hawaii's Department of Health. The Hawaii Association of Independent Schools also keeps us updated with the latest information.

To minimize the spread of influenza in our school, MCS is adopting the current CDC recommendation that **students and adults who have influenza-like illness (seasonal and H1N1) remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever or signs of a fever without the use of fever reducing medications.** A fever is defined by the CDC as 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. Individuals who have a fever and are taking fever reducing medicine and are highly symptomatic should stay home.

Influenza-like symptoms include fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher), body aches, chills, runny nose, sore throat, cough, fatigue, headache, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.. Should a child develop these symptoms while in school, the child will be brought immediately to the office and parents contacted to take their child home as soon as possible. If a staff person becomes ill at school, that individual will also be sent home to recuperate.

Please call the school and let us know if your child develops flu-like symptoms. Your child should remain home until he/she is fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication. We have many individuals within our school community who are at higher risk of serious complications from the flu, including children under the age of 5 and those with medical conditions such as asthma and diabetes. We have pregnant staff members who are also at higher risk of serious complications from the flu. Your cooperation in keeping your sick child home will greatly help to reduce the risk of exposure for everyone, especially these high-risk individuals.

For the safety of our children, staff, and parents, we are closely monitoring influenza and coordinating with the State's Department of Health. High absenteeism due to flu-like illness will be reported to the Department of Health so health professionals can assist us in providing a safe environment for our children, staff, and families. If your child is confirmed by a health professional to have H1N1 please inform the school.

MCS teachers are working with the children on preventing the spread of flu through personal hygiene practices such as washing hands, sneezing or coughing into a tissue or elbow, and refraining from touching their eyes, nose and mouth. Each classroom is equipped with bottles of hand sanitizers. We have instructed our cleaning service to pay special attention to their procedures for sanitizing and cleaning our facilities.

If your child is absent from school for an extended period due to the flu, the teachers will work with you to support your child's learning during his/her absence. The faculty is currently discussing different strategies to address this issue.

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MCS is offering flu clinics through the State's Department of Health. Seasonal flu vaccines will be available to kindergarten through sixth grade students on October 19, 2009. Permission forms were distributed the first week of school. This is a voluntary program. Vaccine availability for H1N1 has not yet been announced. The Department of Health will be advising us as to when that vaccine will be available for our kindergarten through sixth grade students. Younger children will need to visit their personal physician for the flu vaccine.

Parents are being advised by the CDC to take the following steps to prepare for the flu season:

- Ø Plan for childcare at home. Consult with your employer regarding their policy for taking leave to care for your sick child.
- Ø Plan to monitor your child's health while recuperating at home.
- Ø Identify a separate room in the house for the care of sick family members.
- Ø Remind your children to cover their mouth and nose when they cough and to practice good handwashing to minimize the spread of the flu.
- Ø Consult with your healthcare provider about a plan to protect your child during the flu season. Children at high risk of serious complications from the flu include children under 5 years of age and those children with chronic medical conditions, such as asthma and diabetes.
- Ø Update emergency contact lists.
- Ø Collect games, books, DVDs and other items to keep your family entertained if schools are dismissed or your child is sick and must stay home.
- Ø Talk to your school administrators about their pandemic or emergency plan.

If the situation with H1N1 becomes more severe, CDC may recommend stricter guidelines. For example, students who have an ill household member may need to stay home for 5 days from the day the first household member is sick, even if that student has not exhibited any symptoms. This is the time period in which the students are most likely to get sick themselves. People with flu-like illness may need to stay home for at least 7 days even if they have no more symptoms. And, if a school must close, the school may be closed for a minimum of 5-7 calendar days. These measures are not presently recommended under the current conditions. However, parents should be prepared in case the situation worsens.

Future MCS communications on H1N1 will be distributed to you via your child's folder as well as posted on our school's website at www.montessorihawaii.org. If there is urgent news that needs to be shared quickly, we will send an email and/or call parents. Please keep the office informed of any changes to your contact information.

If you have any questions regarding our school's procedures regarding influenza please contact me, Patsy Tom, at ptom@hawaii.rr.com, at 522-0244, or drop by the office. If I am unavailable, Joanne Kennedy can assist you. The following websites contain helpful information: www.flu.gov, www.cdc.gov/swineflu and www.hawaii.gov/health. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Patsy Tom
Head of School