

To the PDS Community:

As I am sure you are all aware, according to the Center for Disease Control the H1N1 virus is expected to reemerge and increase in incidence with the return of students to school and college campuses across the country. Indeed, stories of significant outbreaks at some institutions are already beginning to circulate. With the start of school next week, I know I am not alone in my concern about what we can do to respond to this anticipated health issue.

It is very likely, if not inevitable, that members of our community will contract the H1N1 virus. Our hope, however, is to do all that we can to minimize the health risk and limit the number of cases and the disruption it causes to individuals, their families and the school community. Limiting the impact of H1N1 will require the cooperation of every member of the community to take this threat seriously and responsibly and to abide by the guidelines and policies listed below.

Please read this letter carefully and take time to discuss its contents with family members, colleagues and classmates.

Practice/teach good hygiene. This means teaching students (and with our younger students practicing) to cover their coughs/sneezes with their elbows – not their hands – and for adults to do the same.

Wash hands regularly and keep hands away from the face. We encourage everyone to wash their hands regularly (a minimum of 20 seconds) with soap. In addition, there are Purell hand sanitizer stations located throughout the school and more are being added. We encourage parents of older children to consider providing their child(ren) with their own supply of hand sanitizer.

Those who are sick must not come to school. This is essential for the safety of the ill student and to avoid infecting other students. Children with a temperature of 100 degrees F or greater or flu-like symptoms will be sent home. Please be assured that the school – teachers, coaches, and administrators - will be very accommodating to the needs of students who have been absent for a number of days.

Before returning to school - a child or employee must (without any medication) have had a normal temperature for 24 hours.

Returning students - Students returning to school following absences related to a fever or any flu-like symptoms must first proceed directly to the nurse's office to be examined before going to any other area of the school. Younger students should be accompanied by a parent.

Be vaccinated for the regular seasonal flu: Although a vaccine for the H1N1 will not be available until later this fall, the regular seasonal flu vaccine will be available in the coming weeks. The CDC recommends the seasonal flu vaccine for virtually everyone (see <http://www.cdc.gov/FLU/protect/keyfacts.htm> for exceptions). If a large percentage of students and employees receive the seasonal flu vaccine, we may avoid compounding the potential impact of the H1N1 virus with an outbreak of the seasonal flu.

Learn about H1N1 - the symptoms, how to protect yourself and your family and what to do if you or a family member becomes sick. The Center for Disease Control provides the latest information on H1N1 as well as a guide for parents at: http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general_info.htm and http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/flugallery/2009-10/parents_guide.htm

You may expect to receive additional communications from the school about H1N1 as the fall progresses and we see how this unfolds. Be assured that Nurse Carol Nicholas, the school's physician Dr. Dawn Thompson and I are in regular contact with, and will be guided by, state health officials and agencies, our sister schools, and other sources of information about H1N1. However, those with questions or concerns regarding H1N1 should feel free to contact Nurse Carol or me at any time.

We are an enormously strong community with long traditions of caring for one another and of shouldering the responsibilities necessary to keep each other safe and secure. I am confident that commitment to one another will serve us very well as we face and attend to this potential health issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Stellato', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Paul Stellato
Head of School