

June 15, 2009

Dear Parents and Guardians:

On June 11th, the World Health Organization (WHO) raised the pandemic alert level from five to six for the H1N1 influenza. This is in response to the virus spreading to multiple countries and at least two WHO regions. Despite the new WHO classification, there is no fundamental change to the situation provincially or locally. Cases of H1N1 in Ontario continue to be mild and there have been no hospitalizations or deaths in the County of Simcoe or District of Muskoka.

It is important to recognize that the raised alert level is based on the geographic spread of the illness and not a change in its severity. The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit will continue to vigilantly monitor the illness in our area and will notify us should any changes occur. We want you to know that we are well prepared with our own pandemic plan, which will help us to deal with the spread or escalation of H1N1. We have a strong partnership with the Health Unit, and together, we are committed to keeping you informed about this issue.

The Health Unit has indicated to us that we should proceed as normal in our school communities. They are also asking that we continue to promote proper hygiene practices with students and staff, since this is the best defense against the spread of influenza and other infections.

To protect yourself and your children follow these routine practices:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water or use hand sanitizer
- Practice respiratory etiquette: cough and sneeze into the arm or sleeve
- Promote keeping your child to stay home if sick
- Please see your health care provider if you or your child are experiencing severe influenza-like symptoms.

For more information please contact Health Connection at (705) 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 or visit their website at www.simcoehealth.org. You can also find information on our Board's website at www.smcdsb.on.ca or by visiting the Public Health Agency of Canada at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca>

Keeping the lines of communication with our parents and school communities is important to us. We are committed to providing you with updates and information as it is made available and encourage you to contact your school should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Michael O'Keefe
Director Education