

**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
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**Suzanne E. Godin, Superintendent of Schools
Steven Bailey, Assistant Superintendent
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**Kathleen Cox, Director of Instructional Support
Dianne Paxon, Assistant Director of Instructional Support**

August 31, 2009

Dear Parents:

The H1N1 flu virus continues to be a major factor for schools to address as we reopen our doors this week. It is critical for schools to plan to prevent disease transmission and protect students and staff, as well as our community from flu infection.

The South Portland Health Services team attended the Maine H1N1 conference August 20, 2009 in Augusta. Because school age children are the major transmitters of influenza in a community, and the largest number of cases of H1N1 have been in people between the ages of 5 to 24, we are taking steps to promote a healthy school environment during what could be a challenging flu season with two strains of virus circulating.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends four main ways you and your family may keep from getting sick with the flu at school and at home:

- Practice good hand hygiene by washing your hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow or shoulder, not into your hands.
- Stay home if you or your child is sick for at least 24 hours after there is no longer a fever or signs of a fever (without the use of fever-reducing medicine). Keeping sick students at home means that they keep their viruses to themselves rather than sharing them with others.
- Get your family vaccinated for seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu when vaccines are available.

In the event that your child needs to be sent home from school, please have a plan to pick your child up quickly. If you are immediately unavailable, have an alternate person designated to pick up your child promptly. Further information for parents if children are sick and must stay home can be found at www.flu.gov/plan/school/parentfactsheet.html.

"ENRICHING LIVES THROUGH QUALITY LEARNING FOR ALL"

Based on the above guidelines, South Portland Health Services will be offering flu clinics for school aged children only for both seasonal and H1N1 influenza. More information on these clinics will be available in school newsletters and on our website. Seasonal flu vaccine should be available at the end of September and the first clinic will be based on that availability. H1N1 clinics will follow in October and November as vaccine arrives. These clinics are being coordinated with VNA Home Health Services and Hospice.

Further information on influenza is available at www.flu.gov and www.maine flu.gov. South Portland updates will be available in newsletters and on the homepage of our school website, www.southportlandschools.org. Staying safe relies on good planning and preparation. Let's work together to keep the South Portland school community as healthy as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Suzanne J. Godin".

Suzanne Godin
Superintendent of Schools