

Dear Parents, Whanau and West Spreydon School Community

Please read this carefully and keep it handy

Re H1N1 Pandemic Update as of 12 June 2006

Today the World Health Organization declared that the pandemic status for H1N1 SWINE FLU was Phase 6. This is the highest alert level. At this stage borders are still open and the Pandemic Act has not been applied.

Schools are receiving constant updates from the Ministry of Education, District Health Boards, New Zealand Schools Trustees Association and the Canterbury Primary Principals' Association

This advisory has been endorsed by Dr Alistair Humphreys, Medical Officer of Health for the Canterbury Westland region...

Some principals have been wondering aloud why such a fuss is being made about the swine flu pandemic, when the symptoms don't appear to be any more serious than the ordinary flu. They are also confused by conflicting advice from health and education authorities.

The issue is the infection rate. With normal seasonal influenza the infection rate is about 1 person in every 20. This swine flu epidemic is forecast to infect as many as 1 person in every 3. Thus, in the peak week of infection, if nothing is done about it, there could be 60,000 new infections in Canterbury in that week alone.

When a virus takes off in a community, the infection rate is very steep to start with, then peaks, and then slowly decreases. If the onset is too steep, so many people report for treatment at the same time that services are overwhelmed, and medical staff also succumb to the infection.

The strategy is trying to flatten out the curve of the infection rate, to take the peak out of it, and make it longer and flatter. By slowing down the onset curve, medical planners seek to get us through with hospitals and GP's coping with patients; both those suffering from the swine flu virus, and those with other medical conditions.

Schools' procedures are hugely important as they have the ability to amplify or reduce the effect of a virus on a community.

The CPPA stands by its advice to stand down students (7 days) and teachers (4 days) returning from overseas.

We ask in the interests of the safety of the school and the wider community that you help us to keep your children and your family safe by keeping your child/ren at home for 7 days after returning from an overseas trip, even if they are showing no signs of illness.

We would greatly appreciate being informed of your intentions to travel overseas while the pandemic risk is high so that we have time to consider how we might best keep you, your family and our school families safe upon your return.

In the meantime please be extra, extra careful with hand washing, personal hygiene and by keeping sick children at home.

The Board of Trustees may close the school at very short notice if we are directed to by the Ministry of Education or Ministry of Health or if there is an outbreak in our school.

Ministry of Health" If a school or early childhood service was directed to close it could happen very fast - students would be sent home at the end of the day and told not to return. Your communication with parents needs to be thought through and prepared. Consideration also needs to be given to remote learning and lessons by schools, not just for a week, but potentially several weeks.

There is material on the moh.govt.nz/influenza-a-h1n1"

You must make plans as a family to manage your work commitments and child care as this may happen with very little warning.

It may not be possible for teachers to prepare work for students at short notice but those of you with internet access will be able to use the links from the school's website to explore the many educational sites we have cached for you.

Statement from the Ministry of Education

The primary measures remain of personal hygiene and parents keeping students home if they are sick with flu symptoms. The Ministry of Health advises that parents keep children with flu symptoms at home and call their doctor whether they have been overseas to affected areas or not. Schools and ECE services should follow their normal practices in the event of children displaying symptoms of illness at school or in the ECE service.

Staff should also stay at home if they exhibit flu symptoms.

The Ministry of Health advises that all people should of course be aware of and on the look out for flu symptoms especially if they or their families have travelled in affected areas.

We are in an evolving situation and if conditions in New Zealand change, the Government may request that parents keep students at home if they have returned from affected areas overseas, regardless of whether or not they show symptoms of flu. If this eventuates, parents will receive advice from the Ministry of Health through public communications channels.

In this case, the Ministry of Health would identify where these 'affected areas' are.

For more information

If you need health advice on swine flu, please phone the Healthline on 0800 611 116.

If you have questions about pandemic policies for your school or ECE service, please contact your local Ministry of Education office, email pandemic.planning@minedu.govt.nz [no spam], or consult the Ministry of Education's Pandemic Planning website.

Marriene Langton

Principal

On behalf of the West Spreydon School Board of Trustees