

If you have been watching the news on television lately, you've probably seen the latest report from Federal health officials that at least 36 children in the United States have died from the H1N1 virus (the swine flu). With two confirmed cases of this virus in Tompkinsville, Kentucky and a five-year-old boy in Nashville who tragically died on Monday, August 31st, it is important for all of us to prepare for this virus, as prevention is the key and there are simple steps you can take to avoid this flu.

This strain of flu spreads in the same way that the seasonal flu does via coughing, sneezing, or touching contaminated surfaces and then touching the nose or mouth. Symptoms include a fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headaches, chills, fatigue, and in some cases, diarrhea and vomiting.

"I've heard rumors of flu cases here in Macon County, but not specifically the H1N1 strain," Dawn Thompson, principal of Central Elementary said on Friday morning, September 4th, "and we actually had one student recently, whose parents had called in reporting him sick, but there was no indication that it was the swine flu."

"We had a meeting on Tuesday, August 25th with Jimmy Wheeley," Dawn continued, "and all the principals and school nurses were briefed on what to look for and what precautions to take in the buildings. I have made a schedule for the custodians here at our school, to go into the classrooms while the students are at lunch, to clean everything the kids touch from pencil sharpeners and desks to the computers & door knobs, and they clean again when the day is over."

"We are putting all precautions into place," Alicia Thompson, the school nurse commented, "and we have posters in the restrooms and cafeteria illustrating the proper way to wash your hands and also urging the students to cover their mouths when they cough. If there are any students who seem ill with any of the symptoms, the child will be isolated with a mask and sent home immediately."

"As Alicia said, we are definitely encouraging that all precautions be taken and advising parents to please keep children with a fever at home," Dawn said, "and even though the nurse is closely monitoring student complaints, not everything can be prevented, but we are certainly doing what we can."

Students as well as parents should regularly practice the following steps during the fall flu

season:

1. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
2. Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective.
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
4. Avoid close contact with people who have the flu or flu-like symptoms.
5. Regularly use household disinfectants to clean children's toys as well as household surfaces like kitchen and bathroom counters, and bedside tables.

If you or a family member has flu-like symptoms, you should contact your doctor right away, as there are antiviral medications that can treat both the seasonal and H1N1 flu, and they work best when started during the first two days of the illness.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that children as well as adults stay at home if they are sick and do not return to work or school until you have been fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever suppressing medications.

If you have any questions or concerns, you can visit www.flu.gov or call toll free CDC hotline at 1-800-CDC-INFO.