

Pender Harbour Elementary Secondary Flu Outbreak  
Friday November 6, 2009

We have been experiencing a flu outbreak at Pender that has resulted in absenteeism rates of over 10% for six school days. Thursday October 29 absenteeism was 15% and Friday October 30 it was at 20%. Monday November 2, through Thursday day November 5, the rate was close to or at 40%.

Every day, Margaret has done a careful recording of absent students that includes names, phone numbers and flu symptoms of those who are ill. We have also been monitoring staff illness. These records have been faxed to Deborah Palmer, the Superintendent, and Dr. Paul Martiquet, the Chief Public Health Officer each day. Deborah and Paul analyze the information daily. They are looking for how many people have more than a few symptoms. Some people have only one or two of the symptoms.

There are a number of flu strains present. The labs have been flooded with swabs and it has been difficult to keep on top of the demand in terms of analyzing them. As a result, there have been relatively few confirmed cases of H1N1. The most important measures continue to be:

- practise good prevention,
- if symptoms develop stay home until the symptoms are gone and/or until 48 hours after your temperature is back to normal.

The Public Health stance continues to be to keep schools open. The thinking is that those of us who have not got the flu may be carrying the germs. To release all of us out into the community presents a greater risk to the flu spreading than to keep us contained in the school.

We have had extra custodial hours provided on a regular basis since last Thursday to ensure proper disinfecting of surfaces. An 8-hour shift was added last weekend and an extra shift will be provided again this weekend. Germs live for 30 hours on hard surfaces. So proper disinfecting is key. In the last two days, the custodial supervisor has produced a written protocol for custodians to use to ensure thorough disinfecting of the school on a daily basis.

We have made announcements to remind students about proper hand washing techniques. Sanitizing is not a substitute for hand washing. However, we are happy to provide it as an additional precaution.

I will post further developments as appropriate on the website. Thank you for monitoring your children's health and following precautions as this flu runs its course.