

Message from Acting Superintendent, Mary Paine

To: RSU 2 Families and Communities

Regarding: Infectious Disease Awareness and Preparedness

Dear RSU 2 Families and Community Members,

I hope this letter finds you well. As you know, this year's cold and flu season has been a rough one, and now it is being followed by warnings of the new coronavirus, COVID-19. Locally, our school nurses and principals do an excellent job of communicating with families about the illnesses circulating in our individual schools. With this letter, I would like to provide some general information about current conditions, what you can do to protect our children, and what we are doing as an RSU to address the situation.

Current Conditions

- Seasonal influenza is still active in some schools in the RSU, but overall, we are seeing fewer cases.
- Last week, a stomach virus began spreading among school children; we are hoping it does not become widespread.
- According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), COVID-19 has reached the United States, but there are no reports of confirmed cases in Maine.
- School officials across the US and in Maine are being asked by the CDC to prepare for a potential COVID-19 pandemic.

What You Can Do

1. **Stay tuned and informed:** With all the focus on seasonal flu and COVID-19 in the news and on social media, it's easy to get tired of hearing about it, or conclude that it's all hype. Unfortunately, this media-fatigue can cause us to tune out and lower our guard, putting ourselves and others at risk. The daily media bombardment can also lead to misinformation, confusion, and fear. For a reliable, calm, and accurate source of information, try the [Maine Center for Disease Control & Prevention](#).
2. **Learn new tricks:** By now most of us can easily list all the things we're supposed to do to prevent the spread of germs during cold and flu season. The problem is that many of us learned different rules growing up. Old habits are hard to change. When I was sick as a child, my mom would give me a couple of baby aspirin to lower my fever and send me off to school, reminding me to cover my mouth—with my hands. Fortunately, I did not get Reye's syndrome from the aspirin, and I've learned to cough and sneeze into my elbow. Now I just need to learn the trick of politely avoiding the handshake!

In all seriousness, the hardest rule to follow as a parent is keeping sick children home from school. We understand that working parents can't always stay home without losing wages. However, even though it can be difficult, keeping your children home when they are sick helps them recover more quickly and protects other children. Ultimately, if we all learn and practice [Healthy Habits](#), there might be less illness to keep us home in the first place.

What We Are Doing: Although good personal habits can do a lot to lessen the spread of communicable diseases, unavoidable close contact in schools and ever-changing influenza viruses require additional steps to be taken by the RSU staff and administration. Some of these steps address the current situation and others will prepare us for future events.

Current Steps

- Bus drivers are routinely spraying the air and wiping surfaces with disinfectants;
- Custodians are doing the same inside school buildings, and many teachers are wiping down surfaces during the day;
- Food service staff are maintaining their normal sanitation protocols; and
- School nurses, educators, and administrators are communicating with students and families to encourage good hygiene and staying home when sick.

Preparation

The CDC is encouraging school districts to prepare for a flu pandemic. A flu pandemic happens when a new type of influenza, such as COVID-19, erupts and becomes widespread because no immunity has developed in humans, and no treatment is yet available. In response to the CDC's guidance, we are forming an administrative team to assess our current level of preparedness and develop a plan for widespread health threats in our schools. When the time is right, we will involve community partners in developing this plan, and we will keep our RSU 2 communities apprised.

Thank you for your attention and care. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Good health and a happy spring to all!

Mary

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