



## GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

HEALTH ADMINISTRATION  
2325 Garfield Road North  
Traverse City, MI 49686  
Phone: 231-922-2700 fax: 231-922-4629  
[www.gtchd.org](http://www.gtchd.org)

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October 19, 2009

Dear Parents:

There is some indication that this will be the week for the swine flu to hit our community and our schools. Over the weekend the hospital emergency department noticed a substantial increase in the number of people being seen with flu-like illness, and several were confirmed as flu. Early indications today (Monday) are that we are seeing many more absences than usual in at least some of the schools, and we assume this is due to the swine flu.

This is not unexpected, of course. Michigan has been one of only a handful of states not to have experienced widespread swine flu by this time, so it was bound to start here soon. This is also not a reason for panic or even fear. In spite of the publicity given to the unusually severe cases involving children and young people, it is still true that overall the likelihood of such terrible consequences is very low for any child. We will get the vaccine into the schools as soon as we are able to, but our supplies so far are not sufficient for that.

In the meantime it is common-sense measures of hygiene that remain our best defense against the flu. This is a good time to reinforce with your children the importance of frequent handwashing and of avoiding hand-to-face contacts like rubbing your eyes or nose or chewing fingernails. Remind them also to cough or sneeze into disposable tissues or into their sleeve rather than into their hands or into the air. Keep your children home from school if they seem to be developing flu or cold-like symptoms, and urge them to avoid close contacts with other students who seem ill.

Most of us who develop the swine flu will have a few uncomfortable days but will get over it ourselves without any special measures other than bed rest, hydration, and perhaps fever reducing medications like Tylenol or ibuprofen. Your usual doctor may be very busy in the days to come. But if your child has a chronic medical condition like asthma or diabetes, or if there is difficulty breathing, confusion, extremely high fever, or anything else you find alarming you should certainly contact your child's physician quickly. The Emergency Department at the hospital should be considered a last choice place to go. It will be crowded and full of people with germs to pass to you and to your child.

The next few weeks could be challenging ones for our community and our school system. We will try to communicate frequently and will get through this together in the best way possible.

Sincerely,

Michael Collins, AB, MD  
Medical Director