



## Dickinson-Iron District Health Department

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### Dickinson County

818 Pyle Drive, Kingsford, MI 49802  
Ph: (906) 774-1868 Fax: (906) 774-9910  
BRANCH OFFICE

[www.didhd.org](http://www.didhd.org)

### Iron County

601 Washington Avenue, Iron River, MI 49935  
Ph: (906) 265-9913 Fax: (906) 265-2950  
MAIN OFFICE

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### IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Linda Piper, RN, BSN, MPH  
Director/Health Officer  
Phone: (906) 779-7201  
Email: [lpiper@hline.org](mailto:lpiper@hline.org)

### Back to School Prevention of H1N1 Flu

Kingsford, Michigan – August 21, 2009. Right now, parents everywhere are preparing for a new school year, finding out who their children's teachers will be, buying school supplies, and seeing the doctor to make sure their kids are healthy and ready to learn.

But if you're a parent, you need to add one more item to that back-to-school checklist: preparation for flu. This year we have two kinds of flu to think about, regular seasonal flu and the new 2009 H1N1 flu. Parents need to make plans right now on how to keep their family healthy and what to do if someone does become ill with the flu.

We first saw the new H1N1 virus in the U.S. last April and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that we have had more than 1 million cases in the U.S. so far. Even now, during summer months when flu is usually not around, many areas continue to report illness and actual flu outbreaks. That's very unusual. Because this flu is already causing illness during the "non-flu" season, it is likely that there will be large numbers of us infected this fall and winter, particularly since most people have never been exposed to a strain of flu virus quite like this one and therefore, have no immunity to it.

Similar to seasonal flu, with H1N1 you'll get a fever, cough, sore throat, stuffy nose, achiness, headache, chills and fatigue. Sometimes H1N1 causes diarrhea and vomiting. Just as with seasonal flu, most of us will not become severely ill due to H1N1 but it can lead to hospitalization and even death for some people.

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In particular, H1N1 can be more serious for some people such as very young children, those with an underlying medical condition—such as asthma or diabetes—and pregnant women. So far, it's been most contagious among kids and young adults age six months to 24 years.

Scientists believe this virus could worsen with the arrival of school. But if we prepare for the virus now, it does not have to. School administrators are already working with your local health department on measures to help decrease the spread of illness in schools but everyone should take some basic steps to help prevent illness. Some of these precautions are simple and personal. Make it a routine to wash your hands often with soap and water. Cough into your elbow or into a tissue, not in your hands. Stay home if you're sick, and start planning now in the event that one of your kids gets the flu. Ask yourself these questions: If you work, do you have arrangements for child care if your child is ill? Have you talked with your employer about what to do in case you need to be out? Right now, the CDC is recommending that people with flu stay home until their fever has been gone for at least 24 hours without the use of fever medicines.

If you're an employer, now is the time to plan on how to get work done with a temporarily reduced staff. If you have a plan in place it will be easier to encourage sick employees to stay at home instead of coming to work sick and spreading illness in the workplace.

At the national level, scientists at the National Institutes of Health, the CDC, and the Food and Drug Administration are working with vaccine manufacturers to ensure that a safe H1N1 vaccine becomes available, most likely this fall. They are also closely monitoring the virus to see if it is changing in ways that would decrease effectiveness of a vaccine.

Please remember that this new vaccine will not protect you against regular seasonal flu. The seasonal flu vaccine is recommended for children over 6 months and adolescents, pregnant women, people over 50 years and those with chronic medical conditions. It is also recommended for anyone who would like to avoid getting seasonal flu.

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The Dickinson-Iron District Health Department will be conducting seasonal flu clinics on Saturday, September 19<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon at the Kingsford Middle School and on Thursday, September 24<sup>th</sup> from 9:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. at the Elks Club in Iron River. Call the Health Department at (906) 774-1868 or (906) 265-4150 for more information. You may also ask your healthcare provider when vaccine will be available. H1N1 vaccine will most likely follow later in the fall.

If you want more information, please visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or [www.michigan.gov/flu](http://www.michigan.gov/flu). These sites provide guidance to prepare for, prevent, and respond to an outbreak.

To wrap up: a reminder. Wash your hands, cough in your sleeve, and stay home when you're sick. Get the vaccine when it's available. No one knows what the impact of the fall flu season will be until we're in the middle of it. But how severe the flu becomes this fall will depend on how seriously each of us takes action to reduce the risk now.

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