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To All Parents/Guardians:

As we begin another school year, we would like to share important information with you regarding your family's health and this year's influenza season.

This fall and winter, there will be two types of flu viruses circulating in our communities – the seasonal flu viruses and the new H1N1 flu virus.

Flu-like illnesses spread very easily. Everyone is encouraged to follow the usual infection control precautions to stay healthy and reduce the risk of illness. Precautions include: washing your hands well and often, coughing and sneezing into your sleeve, staying home when you are ill and cleaning and disinfecting shared surfaces. You can help reduce the impact of illness in our community by teaching and encouraging your children to do the same.

The school board will continue to stress the importance of these above mentioned overall good hygiene practices with your children in order to curb the spread of illness in our school environments. Information and instruction on proper hand washing technique is already in place in our schools and is being re-emphasized, along with the advice to avoid sharing food, beverages and other personal items. A copy of this information is on the reverse side.

Prior to sending your children to school, you are encouraged to check them for symptoms of influenza-like illness. Symptoms of influenza-like illness are the acute onset of respiratory symptoms with fever (over 100 degrees Fahrenheit/38 degrees Celsius) and cough and one or more of the following: sore throat, muscle aches, joint pain or weakness. In children under five years of age, vomiting or diarrhea may also be present and fever may not be prominent.

If your child is ill or exhibiting flu-like symptoms, please **keep your child at home** until s/he feels better and is no longer exhibiting flu-like symptoms. **Students who become ill at school will be separated and will need to be picked up at school.** As per standard school practice, all school staff are vigilant for ill students and will report any concerns to the principal; and school caretakers continue to provide enhanced cleaning and disinfection as part of their daily routines.

Windsor Essex County Health Unit has been monitoring the local H1N1 situation and is working closely with other levels of government and various stakeholders, including the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board. Two flu vaccines are being developed against these viruses. The H1N1 vaccine will be available later this fall, while the seasonal flu vaccine will be made available later in the year. Further information will be provided to you by the Windsor Essex County Health Unit when it becomes available.

Our organizations will continue to work closely with one another. Schools will continue to operate as per their daily routines. Any decision to close or modify school operations due to illness will be made in consultation with the Windsor Essex County Health Unit.

In preparation for the upcoming flu season, you are also encouraged to review your own plans for what to do when your child is sick.

If you have any concerns about your child's health, please contact your family physician or call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 (24 hours day/7 days a week).

Additional information and resources are posted both on www.wehealthunit.org and www.wecdsb.on.ca.

Sincerely,

Joseph Berthiaume
Director of Education
Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board

G. Allen Heimann MD, MHSc
Medical Officer of Health
Windsor Essex County Health Unit