

# School officials discuss swine flu with health department

BY DANIEL NASH  
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As the weather turns and the fall season moves full speed ahead, kids grow used to school and parents come to expect the temperatures and sniffles of flu season.

Complicating this flu season is the H1N1 virus, better known as "swine flu." With the recent nonfatal outbreaks at Washington State University and the Penny Arcade Expo in Seattle, and eight H1N1-related deaths in Spokane last month, parents may be concerned about their children in the highly contagious school environment.

Sumner School District administrators met with officials from the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department Oct. 13 to discuss the department's plan for distributing H1N1 vaccine.

Due to scheduling conflicts, the health department will not host a mobile vaccine clinic in Sumner schools. However, vaccine will be available soon from other area schools. The goal is to control viral spread by vaccinating the statistically most affected groups, young people aged six months to 24 years.

After the health department recommended closing Sumner district schools in May

because of swine flu fears, the two organizations are working together to closely monitor absences and possible spread of sickness.

Sumner's current evaluation? Nothing to worry about yet.

"So far our absence rates are exactly what we would expect at this time of the year," Communications Director Ann Cook said. "Absences are slightly higher on Fridays, which is expected. Overall, our absence rate right now hovers around 0.3 percent at most."

That's a far cry from the 10 percent absence rate required for any organization to report to the health department.

If the 10 percent rate is hit in Sumner schools, the health department will begin close monitoring of the affected campuses and determine whether the absences are determined by one epidemic or many unrelated causes.

For more information about H1N1 and distribution of the vaccine, visit [www.tpchd.org](http://www.tpchd.org) or call 253-798-6500.

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