

Schools keep an eye on flu season

By Karen Keady
Correspondent

Although memories of summer are still fresh, school officials are already warning students and parents of the impending flu season.

Registered nurses Trish Roy, who serves Sisters High School and Sisters Middle School, and David O'Keefe, the new nurse at Sisters Elementary School, both say October signals the possible beginning of the influenza season.

"Flu starts in October and goes all the way into spring," said Roy, adding that student absences go up during that period.

She noted several guidelines are listed on the district's website to help parents decide when it's appropriate to keep children home from school due to illness of any kind, not just flu. Those suggestions, approved by the Oregon Department of Education, urge keeping children at home when:

- They have fevers of more than 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Students are not permitted back to class until

their temperature has been less than 100 for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.

- They have vomited within the last 24 hours.

- They have diarrhea. Students are not to return until they have been symptom-free for 24 hours.

- They experience a persistent cough with fever or serious sustained coughing.

- They have jaundice or a skin lesion that can't be contained with a bandage.

Those guidelines are found in the Sisters School District handbook, which parents and students are expected to read, Roy said. She acknowledged that it's hard for a family to limit flu outbreaks once a member of the family is affected.

"One child gets sick and chances are other members of the family will, too," Roy said.

It's impossible to predict just how strong or mild the flu season will be, she added. However, thoroughly washing hands for at least 20 seconds—making sure to lather up—is a good way to ward off illnesses of various kinds,

according to the nurse.

"That's one of the best preventative measures," Roy said.

O'Keefe believes parents should keep their children at home if they're suffering from maladies not listed among the district's guidelines. Sometimes it's difficult to make the call whether school is warranted or not, he said, describing the decision as "a mixture of science and art."

“Flu starts in October and goes all the way into spring.”
— Trish Roy

Also, O'Keefe said students might delay complete recovery from an illness by going back to school too soon. That could cause fatigue that keeps the problem lingering, he said.

The district has an online program to help students keep up with homework assignments during sick-time at home. At the high school



PHOTO BY STEVE KADEL

School nurse Trish Roy helps Sisters Middle School sixth-grader Josie Patton check her blood-sugar level during class.

and elementary school, parents and students can register via the District website to use School Loop, which tracks students' progress, assignments and other data.

The middle school uses a program called Canvas, which allows the same kind of information to be accessed. School officials say getting homework assignments isn't critical if a student is just gone a day or two, but it helps for those missing classes for longer than that.

The Sisters School Based Health Center is an option

for medical treatment for those up to 18 years of age. It operates through a partnership with medical sponsors, Deschutes County Health Services, and Sisters School District. The center is at 1680 W. McKinney Butte Rd. and more information is available by calling 541-526-6623.

Students must be inoculated against several diseases in order to begin the school year. However, Roy said she has checked records of transferring and other new students to make sure they're in compliance.



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