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## Local Schools Tested by H1N1 Virus Lafayette

By Jean Follmer

While there are no reported H1N1 virus cases to date in local schools, Lamorinda was not completely exempt from the "Swine Flu" frenzy.

Administrators spent numerous hours fielding phone calls and taking precautionary measures to prepare for the possibility, while Acalanes Union High School District Superintendent Jim Negri and Miramonte Principal RaEl Zamora dealt with the rumor mill, inflamed after a few students falsely stated on Facebook that they or others had the "Swine Flu."

Parental caution was reflected in a slight drop in school attendance.

"We had STAR testing this week and some kids came in for the test and then went home; it was more precautionary," Orinda Intermediate School Secretary Connie Boero said. "The attendance was pretty much standard except for a few that had the sniffles."

Lafayette Superintendent Fred Brill said the Lafayette School District only saw a slight drop in attendance. The same was true for Moraga. "We had a few calls when it first hit but we didn't really see much change in attendance," Moraga Superintendent Rick Schafer said.

Parents also called local pediatric offices to quell fears about the outbreak. "We had more phone calls than anything, but it really seems to have subsided," said Marianne Bautista of Summit Pediatrics in Orinda. "People had lots of questions and wondered if it was just a cold if they had a cough."

Tasheda Carter of Lafayette Pediatrics concurred.

As for the schools, the H1N1 outbreak offered a tremendous "dress rehearsal" for Lamorinda districts. They reviewed their emergency management procedures already in place and consulted with other districts dealing with confirmed infections.

"We revisited our Emergency Management Plan with the Board," Schafer said. "(Superintendent) Barbara Wilson in Pittsburg helped us understand how to handle school closures and we added that to our existing plan. We learned a lot from the experience: We had a plan and we were ready."

In an effort to answer questions from parents and staff, superintendents from all four districts kept their communities updated through regular e-mail communications. They reminded folks to wash hands regularly, keep sick kids at home and take flu symptoms seriously.

"The information is so dynamic and changing every minute. We are taking all of the precautionary recommendations from the Contra Costa County Department of Education and the County," Brill said.

"The District would work in collaboration with Health Services to determine if a

school should be closed," Superintendent Negri wrote in an e-mail message.

While parents wondered if schools would close as a precautionary measure, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recently changed its policy regarding school closures.

On May 5, the CDC and the Department of Health and Human Services issued a joint statement, noting that the CDC "no longer recommends that communities with a laboratory-confirmed case of influenza A/H1N1 consider adopting school dismissal or child-care closure measures." Students, faculty and staff with symptoms of influenza should now simply "stay home during their period of illness and recuperation, when they are potentially infectious to others."

As of last week, all Bay Area schools that had been closed due to a confirmed case of H1N1 were reopened.

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