



*Vernon — 05/05/2009 – Cover and Page 7*

## **SWINE FLU SCARE SHUTS SCHOOLS**

**School system closes, as staff member tests for swine influenza**

BY STEVE SMITH Staff Writer

Vernon schools were closed on Thursday and Friday last week, due to concerns raised when a staff member reportedly tested positive for the flu. Further testing, to see if that staff member indeed has the influenza type A H1N1 virus, or “swine flu,” were expected over the course of a few days.

The State of Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) had issued an advisory fact sheet that included tips on avoiding the disease, such as washing hands often, and covering mouths and noses when sneezing.

School officials were unavailable for comment, but Emergency Services Manager for the Town of Vernon Michael Purcaro said the teacher at Rockville High School presented at a doctor’s office with “influenza-like symptoms.”

“A decision was made at that time,” Purcaro said, “in the best interest of public health and safety, and as a very precautionary measure, to close the schools and begin a disinfecting process .”

Purcaro said that process includes the cleaning of all surfaces in the school with anti-microbial agents. The DPH also provided guidelines for schools to close if they encounter a suspected case of the flu. At press time, the teacher’s swine flu testing was still unconfirmed.

Several suspected cases across the state were also unconfirmed as of Friday . Some suspected cases, including two students from East Haddam, tested negative for swine influenza.

“We’re working with local and state officials to seek confirmatory test results ,” Purcaro said.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell invited Connecticut school superintendents and municipal leaders to join her on a Thursday morning conference call to educate them about swine flu and update them on the steps the state has taken to deal with the illness.

"I am holding these conference calls to make sure that school officials and the leaders of our cities and towns have the most up-to-date information possible," Rell said. "Our Department of Public Health has prepared guidelines and circulated them through the Department of Education, and the state has posted a wide range of information on the flu Web site, [www.ct.gov/ctfluwatch](http://www.ct.gov/ctfluwatch) .

"The message was presented very clearly by the state health department as far as the guidance that the CDC recommends and the information provided to school officials," Purcaro said, adding that the focus at this time should be on simple, preventative measures that can be taken to avoid the flu.

People should monitor their own health and that of their family members , Purcaro said. "If you are sick, stay home," he said. "Use good hygiene. Wash your hands using soap and water or an anti-microbial agent."

Vernon Police Chief James Kenny said his officers are normally in possession of equipment that protects against environmental hazards, including an N-95 HEPA mask. He said the Center for Disease Control and DPH recommend that the standard precautions be enhanced , and that medical control at Rockville Hospital recommended using the masks when dealing with people with flu-like symptoms. "We've instructed our officers that if they come across, or respond to, any medical calls... that we would have them wear the N-95 mask," he said. "It's a better filter than the standard surgical mask."

Kenny called the disease a "contagious , very virilant version of the flu."

"This is a rapidly-evolving situation," Purcaro said. "Local and state officials, in partnership with the CDC and other government agencies are closely monitoring the situation, and testing is underway . Scientific research is underway, to better understand the virus, and there are many preparedness steps, at the state and local levels, that are being taken to prevent the further spread of the virus. The World Health Organization raised the worldwide pandemic alert level to Phase 5 (of 6) on Wednesday. At press time the CDC had confirmed 109 cases in the U.S., none of which have been in Connecticut, and one death. Purcaro recommended more information can be found at the following frequently updated Web sites: -[www.cdc.gov/swineflu](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu) -[www.ct.gov/dph](http://www.ct.gov/dph) -[www.ct.gov/demhs](http://www.ct.gov/demhs)

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