Influenza (Flu)

1. What is the flu?
The flu is a contagious disease caused by the influenza virus that attacks the nose, throat, and lungs. Most people recover in 1-2 weeks, but some develop serious complications.

2. What are the signs and symptoms of the flu?
Fever, chills, headache, tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, nasal congestion, and body aches are all common flu symptoms. Children can have nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

3. Incubation period: Usually from 1 - 4 days.

4. Contagious period: From the day before signs or symptoms appear until 7 days after the onset of flu. Children can be contagious longer.

5. How does infection with the flu occur?
The flu is spread when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or speaks and another person inhales this virus. The flu can also be spread when a person touches a surface that has the flu virus on it, such as a door handle, and then touches his or her nose or mouth.

6. How can infection with the flu be prevented?
A flu shot can be obtained each fall, before flu season, for prevention. The elderly, people with chronic medical conditions or who are immunocompromised, and very young children (6 - 23 months) are recommended to get the flu shot as they are more likely to develop complications. Persons who care or work with these high-risk groups may also be eligible for the flu shot. Please check with a school/CD nurse or the Department of Public Health regarding current indications for the immunization. Good personal hygiene such as hand washing can also help prevent infection.

7. Is there a treatment for the flu?
The flu cannot be cured by medication, although some antiviral drugs taken within the first two days of illness can reduce the duration of the disease. Rest, drinking plenty of liquids, avoiding alcohol and tobacco use, and taking nonprescription medication to relieve symptoms can help. A child or teenager with flu-like symptoms, particularly fever, should not be given aspirin without first consulting a physician, as a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome can result.

8. What are the circumstances in which the flu could be significant?
While most people recover from the flu in 1-2 weeks, some people develop life-threatening complications. People ages 65 years and older, people of any age with chronic conditions, and very young children are more likely to get complications from the flu such as sinus and ear infections, bronchitis, and pneumonia. The flu can also make chronic health problems worse; for example, people with asthma may experience asthma attacks while they have the flu, and people with chronic congestive heart failure may experience a worsening of their condition. Unusual strains of flu (avian flu) may pose greater risk to populations. The management, exclusion and readmission of students and/or staff with avian flu may be different than the guidelines below.

9. Exclusion: None, unless the child meets other exclusion criteria such as fever with behavior changes, or if the child appears to be severely ill and also when the child is unable to participate comfortably in activities as determined by the school staff (see “General Exclusion Criteria”).

10. Readmission: Upon recovery, by school principal or principal’s designee.