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Weber and Morgan Schools will stay open despite flu

By [JaNae Francis](#)

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Standard-Examiner staff

WEST HAVEN -- The director of Weber-Morgan Health Department has confirmed a handful of cases of flulike symptoms in students at Rocky Mountain Junior High School, which could indicate cases of the H1N1 virus.

Weber School District spokesman Nate Taggart confirmed five or six cases at the school but said overall attendance at the district has not been down.

Last spring, some Park City schools were closed when clusters of the disease occurred there.

But that won't be the case in the Top of Utah at this time.

"Back in March, April and May, the guidance we received from the Centers for Disease Control was to close schools," said Gary House, director of Weber-Morgan Health Department.

"We are no longer closing schools."

"The policy early into the swine flu outbreak (was), we were closing the school," said Lewis Garrett, director of Davis County Health Department.

"The Centers for Disease Control revised those recommendations. We shouldn't close schools unless there is an extraordinary event."

In Davis County, sick students also are being sent home, but no clusters are currently being reported.

"Overall, our absentee rates are still low, but they are starting to trend upward a bit," Garrett said. "We are experiencing a slight increase in the Davis School District."

House listed only the one junior high school as an area where he knew a cluster had occurred, but he did not rule out clusters in other areas.

"We anticipated that there would be clusters of cases when school started again," he said.

"We knew there would be a possibility of significant exposure. Schools represent a significant breeding ground for upper-respiratory infections."

House said students, faculty and staff are asked to stay home if they are sick.

But if they do go to school with symptoms, he said, they are isolated from others until their parents pick them up.

Lori Buttars, spokeswoman for Weber-Morgan Health Department, said the good news about the H1N1 virus is that it isn't as severe as previously anticipated.

Unlike other viruses that target the weak and elderly, this virus often strikes children, she said.

House said health department officials are encouraging teachers to educate their students about proper hand washing and keeping their distance from others, as they have for a couple of years.

Taggart said the district has put up posters at the schools with the message to stay home when ill.

"We ask all parents to keep their kids home if they've got a fever," he said.

House said there are only two approaches to beating the flu, and those are vaccinations, one for seasonal flu and one for H1N1 virus.

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