

## Schools see nearly 20 percent out due to flu, illness

Written by Chris Lee

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With flu in headlines throughout the United States, it isn't any different here in Holyoke. With flu season upon us and other illnesses circulating throughout the community, students in the Re-1J school district have been affected as well.

The school district reported Tuesday, Oct. 13 there were about 126 students absent due to illness or 22 percent of the district. There were 49 absent from the elementary school while 77 were gone from the JR/SR high school.

The numbers fluctuated throughout the week and by Monday the number had come down to about 16 percent of the district out due to illness. There were 61 out in the elementary school and 35 absent in the JR/SR high school for a 16 percent district total.

Supt. Bret Miles said not all the absences are due to the flu. Allergies, strep throat and other illnesses are contributors. The school district has no way of knowing if it is the flu or another illness and furthermore what type of flu in each case.

Miles said the decision of a possible school closing comes at the local level. "We're educators not health professionals," he said. He mentioned they work closely with Northeast Colorado Health Dept. and listen to suggestions made but ultimately the decision comes down to the district.

Although the topic of closing is there, Miles reiterated 80 percent or more of the district's population is still healthy. He said keeping those students in school would be a wise decision.

Miles also said they are keeping a close eye on the health of staff members and teachers. As of Monday, Oct. 19, five staff members were absent due to illness. He said that number grew from one staff member early last week.

Miles said the Center for Disease Control is not advocating entire closures at this time. He also said there wouldn't be an advantage as this is bound to continue for a while. Keeping healthy students in school and continuing to monitor those with symptoms is something they will continue to do.

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The school has stepped up awareness and sent home a letter with each student outlining the situation along with information on how to slow the spread of the flu. They also have allowed for overtime pay for custodial staff so more hours can be spent keeping the schools clean and safe.

They have been disinfecting areas with frequent hand contact such as desks, door knobs and rest rooms. When students are being sent to the office ill, the schools are making efforts to find ways to isolate the student immediately until they can be taken home.

The most important thing to remember is to keep students home when sick. This will help limit the exposure to other students and help the sick student get better.

A sick student may return to school 24 hours after the fever has subsided without the use of fever-reducing medications.