

Swine flu scare in Redlands has subsided, school, clubs re-open

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REDLANDS - The swine flu scare in Redlands has subsided, and the school and clubs closed due to concern of a possible outbreak will re-open earlier than expected.

Clement Middle School and the two Boys & Girls Clubs of Redlands sites- the Hansberger Clubhouse and the Brockton location- announced late Friday afternoon that they would close until Monday, May 11.

A Clement student, who also attended the Hansberger Clubhouse, tested positive for Influenza Type A last week. After a sub-type test deemed the strand "unidentifiable," the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health sent the sample to either the State Department of Public Health, or the CDC to determine if this is in fact a case of swine flu.

"In 90 to 95 percent of cases when sub-types are unidentifiable, it turns out to be swine flu," Jim Lindley, director of public health for San Bernardino County, said Monday.

County officials could not estimate when they would receive results confirming or disproving the presence of swine flu.

The San Bernardino County of Public Health initially advised a seven day closure for schools or programs like the clubs, in the event of a suspected case. The Redlands Unified School District planned to adhere to the suggestion, even if that meant further schools would need to be closed.

Tuesday afternoon, around 1 p.m., the district and the clubs were notified that the county health department had changed the guidelines.

"The CDC and the U.S. Department of Health have changed their recommendations, and there is no longer a need or reason for closures," said P.T. McEwen, CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Redlands. "Things seem to be calming down."

Federal, state, and local public health officials announced Tuesday that the swine flu virus is not as severe as expected, and is comparable to the seasonal flu. Based on that, the county health department lifted their suggestion that Clement and the clubs remain closed.

Clement and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Redlands will be open, as usual, Wednesday, May 6.

"Our staff is ready, and we are excited the kids are coming back," said Clement Principal Robert Clarey.

The decision to re-open early was made Tuesday afternoon, and the school and clubs began notifying parents. School staff contacted local elementary schools, hoping to reach siblings of Clement students. Phone messages were sent to students at 3 and 7 p.m.

"I know there are some kids who have gone out of town," Clarey said. "We are hoping to have 80 percent attendance by Friday."

The school's notification efforts are expected to be successful, as almost all students did hear about the closure.

Staff at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Redlands were also busy calling parents to inform them of Wednesday's re-opening.

"It will be nice to have the kids back," McEwen said.

Clement students will begin the state STAR tests Monday, which were postponed due to the closure.

Officials say parents should not be concerned about sending their students back to school or to the clubs. The health department is closely monitoring the student suspected of having the flu. That student is not expected to return to either location Wednesday.

"While students were out, we had our custodial staff do a thorough cleaning, so we shouldn't have a problem in that area," said Vincent Christakos, assistant superintendent of business services for the Redlands Unified School District. "We are continuing to emphasize frequent hand washing, the use of hand sanitizers at the schools, and that those with flu symptoms should stay home for seven days."

Based on the new guidelines, the district has no plans to close other schools, even in the event of a suspected case of swine flu. The county health department will not recommend any further closures for probable or confirmed cases of swine flu.

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