

Comal ISD swine flu closure recap

The Comal ISD would like to thank all its parents, students and staff for their understanding and cooperation during these last two weeks. We would also like to thank the approximately 91 percent of Comal ISD students in attendance on May 7 and 8, after the school district reopened based on the recommendation of Comal County, state and national health officials.

Here is a breakdown of how events unfolded that led to schools closing and reopening in the Comal ISD:

Monday, April 27 – A Tri-County Adult Education Co-Op GED program employee was diagnosed with a highly probable case of the swine flu. The Comal County Health Department, which was working in conjunction with the Texas Department of State Health Services and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, recommended the Comal ISD close Memorial High, a self-paced campus with about 50 students, because the school shares its building with the GED program.

Comal ISD administrators notified Memorial High students and staff that the school would be closed beginning April 28.

Tuesday, April 28 – With Memorial High already closed, a 5 pm meeting was called at the advice of the Texas Department of State Health Services and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which included the Comal County Health Department and Comal County Health Authority Dr. Dorothy Overman, elected city and county officials and Comal County school district administrators.

Based on the information the Texas Department of State Health Services and CDC was providing, coupled with the fact the number of highly probable cases of swine flu were on the rise locally, Dr. Overman recommended all schools and day cares in Comal County close until May 11. Health officials were very firm about the May 11 reopen date due to the fact this would allow two incubation periods to pass.

Therefore, effective April 29, the Comal ISD, along with the New Braunfels ISD and all private schools and day cares in Comal County made a group decision to close until May 11.

It was agreed upon at this meeting that the group would reconvene on Monday, May 4, or earlier if necessary.

Comal ISD administrators immediately began to get the word out about the school closures in a number of ways: district and campus websites, news release to media members, automated telephone system, email blast to all employees, hotnews email message sent to the more than 8,000 registered users, 904-information hotline, and school marquees.

The following is a link to a letter released by the Comal County Health Department on April 29 recommending all schools be closed for 10 days:

http://www.comalisd.org/News/News_Releases2.asp

Wednesday, April 29 – The University Interscholastic League suspended all extra-curricular competition until May 11.

On April 29, daily media updates were provided, and a FAQ was prepared and updated as needed throughout each day on the Comal ISD website.

Monday, May 4 – At the follow-up meeting with county health officials, state and county elected officials and school administrators, it was stated that the number of two confirmed and two highly probable swine flu cases in Comal County had not increased since Thursday, April 30. Since, however, there were still about 90 possible cases locally, Dr. Overman recommended the course of action with school and day care closures remain the same. Overman said closing the schools helped prevent the spread of the disease, and went on to add that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has learned much more about the swine flu in the past week. CDC has changed the guideline that individuals stay home seven days from the onset of the illness as opposed to its

previous recommendation of staying home an additional seven days after all symptoms are gone.

Tuesday, May 5 – The CDC, the Texas Department of State Health Services, the Texas Education Agency, and the Comal County Health Department revised school closure guidelines and recommend schools reopen.

The CDC now says, “That school closure is not advised for a suspected or confirmed case of novel influenza A (H1N1) and, in general, is not advised unless there is a magnitude of faculty or student absenteeism that interferes with the school’s ability to function. Schools that were closed based on previous interim CDC guidance related to this outbreak may reopen.”

The following is a link to the CDC’s recommendation schools reopen:

http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/K12_dismissal.htm

The following is a link to the Texas Education Agency’s recommendation schools reopen:

<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=4289>

Based on this new recommendation and new guidelines, all schools in Comal County, including the Comal ISD and four others in Guadalupe County, decided to reopen on Thursday, May 7.

Communications began late that afternoon to allow Comal ISD students and staff time to prepare for a May 7 opening.

Wednesday, May 6 – The UIL announced all competition may resume on May 7.

Thursday, May 7 – All Comal ISD schools reopen.

We understand that many of the events over the past two weeks may have impacted a large number of our parents, students and staff. That said, our intentions and those of the other participating agencies (the CDC, Texas

Department of State Health Services, the Texas Education Agency, the Comal County Health Department, and other local city, school and county authorities) were to safeguard our students and community from a type of influenza we simply didn't know much about.

In hindsight, we could have and might have acted differently, but given the available information presented to us at the time, we feel we made the best decision. Likewise, given NEW and ADDITIONAL information on May 4 and 5, we collectively made the decision to reopen our schools. Although the CDC, Texas Department of State Health Services, Texas Education Agency, and the Comal County Health Department revised school closure guidelines and recommended schools reopen as soon as May 6. This was not a feasible date for the Comal ISD and other local districts due to food service, vendor and other issues, so all closed districts in Comal and Guadalupe counties decided May 7 was a realistic date to reopen. We apologize for any inconvenience the school closures may have caused. As always, the Comal ISD will work to improve each and every day.