

School officials prepare for swine flu

By **JASON WITZ STAFF WRITER**

With two cases of swine flu now confirmed in Florida, Charlotte County School officials are taking preventive measures to ensure it does not become a problem locally.

Since Monday, Gail Buck, supervisor of district health services, has been meeting daily with representatives of the **Charlotte County Health Department** to review procedures in the event additional cases surface. At this point, officials believe it could be just a matter of time before that happens.

“It’s not a cause for alarm,” said Superintendent David Gayler. “It’s a cause for being vigilant.”

Gov. Charlie Crist said the flu strain H1N1 was confirmed Friday in Lee and Broward counties, involving an 11-year-old boy and a 17-year-old girl, respectively.

Swine flu has been confirmed in at least 19 states, with Texas and New York leading the pack in overall numbers. One person has died in the United States as a result of the outbreak.

“We’re taking it seriously,” Gayler said. “(But) this does not change anything for us.”

The district has taken steps, however, to keep faculty and parents aware of the virus, as well as to remind people that basic hygiene can prevent illness.

Buck said it’s necessary to teach children proper cough and sneeze etiquette, and the importance of regular hand washing.

“Everybody has to take a personal responsibility in it,” Gayler said.

In all, eight suspected cases of swine flu in Florida were sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta for further testing. Two of the samples came from Lee County.

Since the number of cases continues to change daily on a national scale, Buck said it’s important to keep everyone updated through regular phone and e-mail contact.

“We’ve been lucky so far in Charlotte County,” she said.