



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
250 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02108-4619

DEVAL L. PATRICK
GOVERNOR

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

JUDYANN BIGBY, MD
SECRETARY

JOHN AUERBACH
COMMISSIONER

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H1N1 Virus (Swine Flu) Information for Parents

Is it safe for my child to go to school?

At this time, state and local public health officials have advised that students can---and should--continue to come to school, as long as they are not sick and do not have flu symptoms. Flu-like symptoms include: fever (over 100 degrees F), feverishness, cough, sore throat, runny nose, or stuffy nose. Additional symptoms may be experienced with swine flu, including muscle pain, fatigue, and sometimes vomiting or diarrhea.

The Department of Public Health has a fact sheet on swine flu that is available on the DPH website, www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu in English and other languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Haitian Creole and Chinese.

What should I do if my child is sick?

Flu spreads easily. If you think your child is getting the flu:

- It is very important that he/she does not go to school or other places where they might make other people sick, such as group childcare, after school programs, the mall, or sporting events.
- Call your doctor's office and let him/her know your child's symptoms and history. Your doctor will advise you whether you should come to the office. It is best to call ahead because several doctors' offices have provisions in place to respond to possible H1N1 (swine) flu cases.
- Keep your school nurse updated on your child's medical condition.
- When you call to the school to notify them that your child is sick, please tell the school nurse if he/she has flu-like symptoms.

If your doctor advises you to care for your child at home, the Centers for Disease Control has a guide on taking care of a sick person at home. It can be found at, http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/guidance_homecare.htm.

Some tips from that guide include:

- Establish a rule in your house that everyone covers their coughs, and cleans their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often, especially after coughing and/or sneezing.

- Keep the sick person in a room separate from the common areas of the house. (For example, a spare bedroom with its own bathroom, if that's possible. Keep the sickroom door closed.
- Keep your child at home unless necessary for medical care and don't have playmates or other guests over during this time. Your child may be able to pass the virus for 7 days or longer, so check with your doctor on recommendations for when he/she can return to school
- Try to protect other people in the home. For example, if possible, have only one adult in the home take care of the sick person (not a pregnant woman). Clean surfaces regularly with a disinfectant and maintain good ventilation. Remember to wash you hands.
- Monitor yourself and household members, including the elderly, for flu symptoms and contact a health care provider if symptoms occur.
- Throw away tissues and other disposable items used by the sick person in the trash. Wash your hands after touching used tissues and similar waste.
- Linens, eating utensils, and dishes belonging to those who are sick do not need to be cleaned separately, but importantly these items should not be shared without washing thoroughly first.

What can I do to keep my child from getting sick?

It is also important to teach your children how to reduce their risk of getting the flu and how to protect others from becoming infected.

- **Teach your children to wash their hands often.** Washing with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds is ideal (that is about as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice).
- **Teach your children the proper use of hand sanitizer.** Gels, rubs, and hand wipes all work well, as long as they contain at least 60% alcohol. Hand wipes must be disposed of properly. (Monitor small children using gels as they may ingest it.)
- **Teach your children to cough or sneeze into your sleeve—not their hands!** Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of their elbow. They should wash their hands after blowing their nose or coughing into a tissue.
- **Teach your children to avoid touching their nose, mouth or eyes.** They should keep their hands away from their face.

If we all practice good hygiene, health officials believe we can limit the spread of swine flu in our schools and child care centers.

Will my child's school be closed if there is a case of swine flu?

School leaders and state and local health officials are closely monitoring the situation and will inform parents as soon as possible if your child's school must be closed. However, it is important to plan ahead. **Have a family discussion now to decide who would care for your child if his/her school were closed.**

If school is closed, it is important that students not gather together at another location, but rather stay home to avoid exposing other people.

How can I keep track of what is going on in my community?

Please stay informed by getting up-to-date information on swine flu and what you can do to keep your family healthy from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health at www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu, the National Centers for Disease Control website, www.cdc.gov/swineflu/ or the 24 hour toll-free hotline that Massachusetts residents can call for general information about swine flu. To reach the hotline, dial 211.

What precautions are being taken at schools?

Precautions being taken in our schools:

- Careful hand washing is very important in preventing the spread of disease, including Swine Flu. School Nurses have been and will continue to conduct hand washing/ “cover your cough” education programs district wide. They will continue to remind students and staff of their importance.
- All school nurses, food services staff, principals and school faculties are working to prevent Swine Flu through proactive steps, communication, and universal precautions.
- The electronic documentation system used by school nurses can be utilized for disease surveillance by tracking trends by symptoms, so that potential public health issues can be identified quickly.
- School nurses are working closely with local and state public health authorities as questions arise.

Thank you for your cooperation in keeping our children and our schools healthy.