

H1N1 Update

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Welcome back! I would like to update you all on the **H1N1** virus.

First of all, this is not a new virus; it is what was previously being called the **swine flu**.

Now that we have that clarified, here's what you need to know and steps we can all take to keep everyone healthy and our schools open this fall. The goal of school and public health officials is to prevent illness and keep schools open.

1. First and foremost: **WASH THOSE HANDS!** Teach your children how to wash and encourage them to wash frequently with soap and hot water. Have them sing their ABC's or sing Happy Birthday to themselves a couple of times to ensure they are washing for long enough.
2. Teach your child to cough and sneeze into their elbow – not their hands. If a tissue or hands are used have them dispose of the tissue immediately and have them wash their hands.
3. Get your child both the seasonal flu and H1N1 flu shots. Vaccination is the best way to keep your child from getting the flu.
4. Teach your children to use hand sanitizer. Gels, rubs, and hand wipes all work well, as long as they contain at least 60% alcohol. Watch small children using gels so they don't swallow it.
5. Teach your children to avoid touching their nose, mouth or eyes. They should keep their hands away from their face.
6. Know the symptoms. **TAKE THEIR TEMPERATURE.** Flu-like symptoms include fever (over 100.4 degrees F), with cough and/or sore throat. Additional symptoms include: runny nose, stuffy nose, headache, body aches, feeling very tired, and sometimes vomiting or diarrhea. A fever fact sheet with information about how to take a temperature is available on the Massachusetts Department of Public Health influenza website: mass.gov/flu
7. If you think your child is getting the flu:
 - Keep your child home. It is very important that your child does not go to school or other places where they could spread the flu virus to other people, such as group childcare, after school programs, the mall, or sporting events.
 - Call your doctor's office and let them 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 so that you help prevent spreading illness to others.

- Call the school to notify them of your child's illness. Tell the school nurse if your child has flu-like symptoms.
- Keep your school nurse updated on your child's medical condition.
- Do not give your child or teenager (18 years of age or younger) aspirin or aspirin-containing products due to the rare but serious illness called Reyes syndrome.
- **ALL INDIVIDUALS WITH FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS SHOULD STAY HOME FOR AT LEAST 24 HOURS AFTER THEY NO LONGER HAVE A FEVER, WITHOUT USING FEVER-REDUCING MEDICINES.** These medicines include Motrin or Advil (ibuprofen), Tylenol (acetaminophen) or a store brand. Keeping children with a fever home will keep them from getting other people sick. For most people this will be about 4 days.
- Schools are **not** allowed to accept a doctor's note recommending a child with flu-like symptoms return to school before the time period described above.

A handout will be sent home soon with every student in the district outlining this information. If you would like more information call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Hotline: 211 or go to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health influenza website: mass.gov/flu

Thanks for your attention.

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