



*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health*

Information about Flu in Schools

August 31, 2009

Will H1N1 (swine) flu come back this fall?

Public health experts expect that H1N1 flu will come back this fall and will spread in communities at the same time as the seasonal flu.

It seemed like H1N1 influenza was pretty mild in the spring. Should I be any more worried about it this fall than regular seasonal flu?

Many people who had H1N1 flu were not seriously ill. While most people who were sick got better without needing medical treatment, some people were hospitalized and some have died. Most of the people who became very sick were pregnant or had health problems like diabetes, asthma, heart disease, kidney disease, or suppressed immune systems.

Will the H1N1 flu virus be stronger than it was last spring and make people sicker?

We don't know whether it will be stronger than in the spring, or stronger than seasonal influenza. We do know that more people will get sick with the H1N1 virus because it's a new virus, and most people have no immunity. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other health organizations will continue to monitor the virus to see if it changes.

What can I do to keep from getting sick?

It is important to reduce the risk of getting the flu and to protect others from becoming infected. If we all practice good hygiene, we can limit the spread of flu.

- **Get both the H1N1 and seasonal flu shots.** Vaccination is the best way to keep from getting the flu.
- **Wash your hands often.** Washing with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds is ideal (about as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice).
- **Use hand sanitizer.** Gels, rubs, and hand wipes all work well, as long as they contain at least 60% alcohol.
- **Cough or sneeze into your elbow—not your hands!** Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of your elbow. Wash your hands after blowing your nose or coughing into a tissue.
- **Avoid touching your nose, mouth or eyes.** Keep your hands away from your face.

Should I get the H1N1 flu shot?

H1N1 flu shot should be available in October. The H1N1 flu shot is recommended for everyone, especially:

- pregnant women
- household contacts and caregivers of infants less than 6 months of age
- people aged 6 months to 24 years old
- people 25 to 64 years old who have certain health problems like heart disease, asthma, diabetes, weakened immune systems, and certain muscle or nerve conditions that can lead to breathing or swallowing problems
- healthcare providers and emergency medical services staff

Can the seasonal flu shot and the H1N1 flu shot be given at the same time?

Experts believe that seasonal flu shots and H1N1 flu shots can be given at the same time. However, we expect the seasonal flu shot to be available earlier than the H1N1 flu shot. Because the seasonal flu will still make people sick, people are encouraged to get their seasonal flu shot as soon as it is available.

If I got sick this spring with flu-like symptoms, am I protected from getting it again this fall?

Unless you had a laboratory test that confirmed you had H1N1 influenza, it's possible that you had something other than H1N1. Even if you had H1N1 influenza, we don't know how much immunity it will provide for the fall. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and CDC recommend H1N1 vaccine for everyone.

If there is H1N1 flu in my community, is it safe to go to school?

At this time, state and local public health officials recommend that staff and students can--and should--continue to go to school, as long as they are not sick and do not have flu symptoms. Flu-like symptoms include: fever (over 100.4 degrees F), with cough and/or sore throat. Additional symptoms of H1N1 flu include: runny nose, stuffy nose, headache, body aches, feeling very tired, and sometimes vomiting or diarrhea.

What should I do if I am sick?

Flu spreads easily from person to person. If you think you are getting the flu:

- Stay home. It is very important that you do not go to school or other places where you 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 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.

• **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. Staying home with a fever will keep other people from getting sick. For most people, this will be about 4 days. See the 'Flu Symptom Checklist for Families' on page 3 for more information.

- Schools are **not** allowed to accept a doctor's note recommending a person with flu-like symptoms return to school before the time period described above.

Will school be closed if there is a case of flu?

School and public health officials will be focused on preventing the spread of the flu in schools so that schools can stay open. These officials will be closely following the situation and will inform you in the unlikely event that school is closed. However, it is important to plan ahead. If school is closed, it is important that students not gather together at another location, but rather stay home to avoid spreading the flu virus to other people.

What precautions are being taken at schools?

- Careful hand washing is very important in preventing the spread of disease, including the flu. Continue to remind and teach students and employees about hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes.
- School nurses will keep track of students and employees sick with flu-like symptoms, so that potential outbreaks can be identified quickly.
- School nurses are working closely with local and state public health authorities as questions arise.

Where can I get more information?

- Massachusetts Department of Public Health website at www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health information line at 211
- Holyoke Public Schools website at www.hps.holyoke.ma.us

Flu Symptom Checklist for Employees

Updated August 31, 2009

The main symptoms of influenza (flu) include **fever and cough and/or sore throat**. Some people also have a runny nose, body aches, headache, chills and feel tired. Some people also have diarrhea and vomiting. The most important thing that you can do to keep flu from spreading in the community is to stay at home when you are sick.

SHOULD I STAY HOME?

- Yes No Have you had a fever of 100.4 degrees or more in the past 24 hours?
 Yes No Do you have a cough **OR** sore throat?

**If you answered YES to both questions above, stay home.
You have an influenza-like illness.**

CAN I RETURN TO SCHOOL?

- Yes No Have you had a fever of 100.4 degrees or more in the past 24 hours?
 Yes No Have you had acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil) in the past 24 hours?

If you answered NO to both questions above, you can return to school.

If you answered YES to one of the questions above, you CANNOT return to school. Stay home for at least another day to observe for additional symptoms. Then use the checklist questions again to decide whether you should continue to stay home.

Where can I find more information about influenza?

- 1) Call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health information line: 211
- 2) Go to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health influenza website: [mass.gov/ flu](http://mass.gov/flu)
- 3) A "**Fever Fact Sheet**" with information on how to take a temperature is also available.