

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

August 27, 2010

TO: Parents and Guardians of School-Age Youth in Massachusetts

FROM: John Auerbach, Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Mitchell Chester, Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

RE: **Influenza – Back to School Update**

We would like to thank you for the very successful and coordinated response to pandemic H1N1 influenza last year! By getting vaccinated, being careful about coughing and sneezing, washing hands regularly, and keeping children home when they were ill, we were able to keep children healthy and avoid most school closures and the disruption they cause. We could not have done this without your support and cooperation.

Influenza, including the pandemic H1N1 kind, is expected to be circulating in Massachusetts this fall and winter. Influenza causes a great deal of illness and many deaths every year, and can result in missed days of school and missed days of work. It can be a dangerous illness in very young children, and in children with chronic health problems that make them more likely to get very sick if they get the flu.

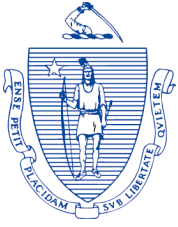
Much of what we need to do, to prepare for and to respond to the flu, has not changed since last year. However there are some important differences this year:

- **Flu vaccination (the shot or nasal spray) is now recommended for everyone 6 months of age or older.**
- This year's vaccine (shot or nasal spray) contains protection against both the pandemic H1N1 influenza and two other kinds of influenza.

Just like last year, children who have flu-like illness (fever with either cough or sore throat) should be kept home for least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever without the use of fever reducing medicines like Motrin, Advil, Tylenol or a store brand. For most children, this will be about 4 days.

We are including two documents to help you with the flu this year. They are the *Flu Symptom Checklist for Families and Schools* and *Information for Parents about Flu and Schools*. We will be sharing all of the same information with doctors and your local boards of health. It is important that we all understand what we need to do to protect our children from the flu and how to take care of them if they do get sick.

**Thank you for your help and cooperation in keeping our children and our schools healthy.
For more information about flu, go to mass.gov/flu**



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

August 27, 2010

Information for Parents about Influenza and Schools

Is influenza still a concern in Massachusetts?

Yes. Influenza, is also called “flu.” Flu, including the pandemic H1N1 kind, is expected to spread in Massachusetts this fall and winter. Flu is a cause of serious illness in thousands of people every year. It can be prevented with a vaccine (shot or nasal spray).

Why is this important?

Flu can be very serious, especially for children 5 years old and younger, and for children and adults with chronic health conditions that make them more likely to get sick with the flu. Children with the flu miss days of school, can cause parents to miss work, and can spread the flu to others who may become seriously ill.

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

- **Get your child vaccinated** (the flu shot or nasal spray). Vaccination is the best way to keep your child from getting the flu. This year’s vaccine protects against both the pandemic H1N1 influenza and two other kinds of flu. Your child needs to be vaccinated this year, even if vaccinated last year.
- **Teach your children to wash their 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).
- **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.
- **Teach your children to cough or sneeze into their elbow—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.

Is flu vaccine safe?

Yes. Flu vaccines are among the safest medications that are administered to people, including prescription drugs and over-the-counter medications. Like any vaccine or medication, flu vaccine should be administered by trained health professionals who will determine which vaccine is best for you and your child.

What should I do if my child is sick?

- **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 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. Your doctor will advise you whether you should come to the office. It is best to call the office first to avoid spreading flu to others at the doctor’s office.

- Call your child's school to notify them that your child is sick, and tell the school nurse if your child has flu-like symptoms, such as fever, cough and/or sore throat. 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 Reye syndrome.

How long should I keep my child at home?

- **All individuals with flu 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. For most children, this will be about 4 days. Use the *Flu Symptom Checklist for Families and Schools* as a guide. 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.

Is it safe (as far as flu is concerned) for my child to participate in sports?

Just like going to school, students should continue to play sports as long as they are not sick and do not have flu symptoms. While playing sports and engaging in other recreational activities, students should avoid sharing water bottles, sharing drinks, or sharing mouthpieces, which could result in transmission of flu and other illnesses.

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

School and public health officials will be focused on preventing the spread of flu in schools so that schools can stay open. They will closely follow the situation and will inform you in the unlikely event that your child's school is closed. However, it is important to plan ahead. Talk to your family now to decide who would care for your child if school is closed. When school is closed, it is important that students not gather together at another place. They should stay home to avoid spreading the flu to other people.

What precautions are being taken at schools?

- School nurses and teachers will teach students about hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes.
- School faculty and staff will also stay home when sick with flu symptoms, cover their mouths when they cough or sneeze, and wash their hands often.
- School nurses will keep track of students who are sick with flu-like symptoms, so they can quickly identify flu in the school.
- Schools are cleaned regularly, especially where germs can spread, such as water fountains.
- School nurses work closely with local and state public health authorities.
- Some schools and local boards of health are planning for school located flu vaccination clinics to help protect students against the flu.

Where can I get more information?

- Call your doctor, nurse or clinic, or your local board of health
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health website at mass.gov/flu
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at: www.cdc.gov/flu

For flu clinic, visit the MassPRO Public Flu Clinic Finder website at: <http://flu.masspro.org/> or call 617/983-6800.

Flu Symptom Checklist for Families and Schools

Updated August 27, 2010

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 keep your sick child at home when they are sick.

SHOULD I KEEP MY CHILD HOME?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Has your child had a fever of 100.4 degrees or more in the past 24 hours?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Does your child have a cough OR sore throat?
If you answered <u>YES</u> to <u>both questions</u> above, keep your child home. Your child has an influenza-like illness.	
CAN MY CHILD RETURN TO SCHOOL?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Has your child had a fever of 100.4 degrees or more in the past 24 hours?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Has your child had acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil) in the past 24 hours?
If you answered <u>NO</u> to <u>both questions</u> above, your child can return to school.	
If you answered <u>YES</u> to one of the questions above, your child CANNOT return to school. Keep you child home for at least another day to observe for additional symptoms. Then use the checklist questions again to decide whether you should continue to keep your child home.	

Where can I find more information about influenza?

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