

Some things to know about the flu

During the spring of 2009 a new flu virus started making people sick in the United States and throughout the world. At first this illness was called “swine flu,” but now you may hear it called H1N1 flu. To date, most people effected with the H1N1 flu virus have experienced mild to moderate illness, similar to seasonal flu. However, the flu can be serious, and many more people may get the flu this school year.

What can you do?

- Get the seasonal flu vaccine now. It won't protect you from H1N1 flu, but seasonal flu is also circulating and can make you just as sick.
- Get the H1N1 flu vaccine as soon as it is available, according to the priority groups established by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Everyone should eventually be able to get the H1N1 flu vaccine, but those at highest priority are:
 - Pregnant women
 - Health care workers and emergency medical responders
 - People caring for infants under 6 months of age
 - Children and young adults from 6 months to 24 years
 - People aged 25 to 64 years with underlying medical conditions (e.g. asthma, diabetes)
- Sick kids should stay home! They should NOT go to school, work, or out in public. If you think you have the flu, you should stay home and away from others. Individuals with flu-like symptoms should remain home for at least 24 hours after fever has disappeared (without the use of fever-reducing medication).
- Practice healthy habits. Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze with a tissue – not your hand. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve. Wash hands often with soap and warm water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Wash and rub hands for 20 seconds – as long as it takes to sing Happy Birthday twice. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.

Flu in our school

We expect that some people in our school will get the flu. Treatment for the H1N1 flu is the same as for seasonal flu. Rest, fluids and medicine to reduce body aches and fever, are all that most of us need to recover. For people with certain underlying medical conditions, such as those with asthma and other chronic diseases, flu can be more serious, and these individuals should contact their health care provider.

More information about the flu is available at www.nyhealth.gov and www.flu.gov.

This information is brought to you by the New York State Department of Health, the New York State Education Department, and your local school.

Questions and Answers About H1N1 and Seasonal Flu

Q1. Why should we be concerned about the spread of flu in schools?

A1. Large numbers of students in close proximity to each other create an environment conducive to the flu spreading to other students and their families. So far, the largest number of cases of H1N1 flu has been in people between the ages of 5 and 24 years old.

Q2. Which students and staff are at higher risk for complications from flu?

A2. Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people), and serious problems from the flu can happen at any age. However, children under the age of 5 years, pregnant women, people of any age with chronic medical conditions (such as pulmonary disease, including asthma, diabetes, neuromuscular disorders or heart disease), and people age 65 years and older are more likely to get complications from the flu. On the other hand, people age 65 and older are less likely than younger individuals to be infected with H1N1 flu.

Q3. What can families, students, and school personnel do to reduce the chances of getting sick and spreading flu?

A3. Families, students, and school staff can reduce their chances of getting sick with flu in several ways:

- Get vaccinated against both seasonal and H1N1 flu as soon as you can.
- Practice good hand washing. Students and staff members should wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing and before eating.
- Cover your cough! The main way that the flu spreads is from person to person in the droplets produced by coughs and sneezes. So it's important to cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow or shoulder, not into your hands.
- Stay home if you're sick. Keeping sick students at home means that they keep their germs to themselves rather than sharing them with others.

Students, staff, and their families must take personal responsibility for helping to slow the spread of the virus by practicing these steps to reduce their chances of getting sick or spreading the flu.

Q4. What should I do if I'm pregnant and I work or attend a K-12 school?

A4. Pregnant women working in or attending schools should follow the same guidance as the general public about staying home when sick, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces. Pregnant women are at higher risk of complications from flu and should speak with their doctor as soon as possible if they develop a flu-like illness to find out whether they should take antiviral flu medicines. Any person at high risk for flu complications should do the same. Early treatment with antiviral flu medicines is recommended for pregnant women who have the flu. Pregnant women are part of the first priority group to receive the H1N1 flu vaccine.

Q5. How long should a sick student or staff member stay home?

A5. A sick student or staff member with symptoms of flu should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have fever or signs of a fever, without using fever-reducing drugs. Sick people should stay at home, except to go to the doctor's office, and should avoid contact with others. Keeping people with a fever at home may reduce the number of people who get infected.

Q6. Can the virus live on surfaces, such as computer keyboards?

A6. Yes, flu viruses may be spread when a person touches droplets left by coughs and sneezes on hard surfaces (such as desks or door knobs) or objects (such as keyboards or pens) and then touches his or her mouth or nose. However, it is not necessary to disinfect these surfaces beyond routine cleaning. Clean surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact with cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas.

Q7. Why would one school dismiss students and another school continue to remain open?

A7. School action steps will vary based on the severity of the situation and the impact it is having in the school. Decisions for school dismissal are made at the local level, based on the number and severity of cases in the school and community. Because the impact of flu on a community will differ from location to location, the steps that are taken will also be different.

Also, certain schools may have a large number of students who are at high risk for complications from the flu (such as pregnant teens). These schools may decide to close based on the local situation while other schools in the community remain open.

Tips for taking care of children (and other household members) with the flu:

- **Stay home if you or your child is sick** until at least 24 hours after there is no longer a fever or signs of a fever (without the use of a fever-reducing medicine). Keeping sick students at home means that they keep their viruses to themselves rather than sharing them with others. Stay home even if taking antiviral medicines.
- **Cover coughs and sneezes. Use a tissue and dispose of it properly after use. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve, not your hands. Clean hands** with soap and water often and especially after coughing or sneezing.
- **Keep sick household members in a separate room** (a sick room) in the house as much as possible to limit contact with household members who are not sick. Consider designating a single person as the main caregiver for the sick person.
- **Monitor the health of the sick child and any other household members** by checking for fever and other symptoms of flu. A fever is a temperature taken with a thermometer that is equal to or greater than 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees Celsius). If you are not able to measure a temperature, the sick person might have a fever if he or she feels warm, has a flushed appearance, or is sweating or shivering.
- **Watch for emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention.** Warning signs include:
 - Fast breathing or trouble breathing
 - Bluish or gray skin color
 - Not drinking enough fluids
 - Not waking up or interacting
 - Not urinating or no tears when crying
 - Severe or persistent vomiting
 - Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
 - Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
 - Sudden dizziness
 - Confusion
 - Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

- **Check with your doctor about any special care** needed for household members who may be at higher risk for complications from flu. For the H1N1 flu this includes children under the age of 5 years, pregnant women, and people younger than 65 who have chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease). Seasonal flu is a higher risk than H1N1 flu for people 65 years of age or older.
- **If possible, a caregiver for the person who is sick should be someone who is not at high risk for complications of flu.** If that is not possible, the caregiver should wear a facemask, if tolerated.
- **Ask your doctor about antiviral medicines or fever-reducing medicines** for sick household members who are at high risk for complications of flu.
- **Do not give aspirin to children or teenagers;** it can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome
- **Make sure sick household members get plenty of rest and drink clear fluids** (such as water, broth, sports drinks or electrolyte beverages for infants) to keep from being dehydrated.

For more information:

- See: www.nyhealth.gov, www.flu.gov, <http://usny.nysed.gov/swine-flu-info.html>, www.schoolhealthservices.org.
- NYSDOH H1N1 Flu Hotline: 1-800-808-1987
- New York City call 311
- 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)
- 1-888-232-6348 (CDC TTY)

Action Steps for Parents of Children at High Risk for Flu Complications

Children with chronic health problems such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, metabolic conditions, neurologic and neuromuscular disorders, or who are pregnant are at higher risk of having complications from flu. In addition, all children younger than 5 years old are at higher risk of flu complications compared to older children. If you are not sure if any of your children are at higher risk for flu complications, please check with a doctor.

Keep children at high risk for flu complications from getting sick with the flu

- **Make sure your child's hands are washed** for 20 seconds with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub (if soap and water are not available) often and especially after coughing or sneezing.
- **Keep your child away from people who are sick.**
- **Clean surfaces and objects that your child frequently touches** with cleaning agents that are usually used.
- When there is flu in your community, consider your child's risk of exposure if they attend public gatherings. In communities with a lot of flu, **people who are at risk of complications from flu should consider staying away from public gatherings.**
- If flu is severe in your community as determined by NYSDOH, talk to your doctor and child's school to **develop a plan on how to handle your child's special needs.**
- **Get your child vaccinated** for seasonal flu and H1N1 flu when vaccines are available.

Recognize if your children are sick

Some children may not be able to tell you about their symptoms, which can result in a delay in responding to their illness. It is important to watch carefully for the signs and symptoms of flu or unusual behavior that may be a sign your child is sick. Symptoms of flu include:

- Fever
A fever is a temperature taken with a thermometer that is equal to or greater than 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees Celsius). If you are not able to measure a temperature, your child might have a fever if her or she feels warm, has a flushed appearance, or is sweating or shivering.
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches and fatigue.

Watch for emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention. These warning signs include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not urinating or no tears when crying
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Please share this information with your child's teacher or other caregivers, so they can tell you if they notice your child is not feeling well.

Tips for taking care of high risk children with the flu

Contact your doctor immediately if your child is sick. This is important because the antiviral medicines used to treat flu work best when started within the first 2 days of getting sick. Your doctor will tell you what special care is needed for your child.

Keep your sick child at home until at least 24 hours after there is no longer a fever or signs of a fever (without the use of a fever-reducing medicine). Keep your child home unless they need to go to the doctor.

Make sure your child gets plenty of rest and drinks clear fluids as recommended by your health care provider (such as water, broth, sports drinks, electrolyte beverages for infants, Pedialyte®) to keep from being dehydrated.

If your child has a fever, use fever-reducing medicines that your doctor recommends based on your child's age. Aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) **should not** be given to children or teenagers who have flu; this can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome.

Keep your sick child in a separate room (a sick room) in the house as much as possible to limit contact with household members who are not sick. Consider designating a single person as the main caregiver for the sick child.

For more information:

- See: www.nyhealth.gov, www.flu.gov, <http://usny.nysed.gov/swine-flu-info.html>, www.schoolhealthservices.org.
- NYSDOH H1N1 Flu Hotline: 1-800-808-1987
- New York City call 311
- 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)
- 1-888-232-6348 (CDC TTY)

Internet Resources

The following web sites offer valuable learning opportunities for students:

www.abledata.com/abledata.cfm?pageid=113582&orgid=16188 Virtual assistance technology center, free downloads to meet a variety of software needs, resources of assistive technology

www.ala.org/greatsites Approved by the American Library Association, an interactive magazine and a series of sublinks; K-8

www.crews.org/curriculum/sp/ Lessons and activities for special needs

www.dotolearn.com/ Activities in reading, math, motor skills, and life skills; special needs population

www.education.noaa.gov National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, activities and facts; K – Higher Education

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PBS_kids PBS sponsored encyclopedia and dictionary, articles by topic; K-12

<http://headlinespot.com/for/kids/> News by subject; level varies per topic, K - 12

www.loc.gov/families Library of Congress sponsored, stories, primary sources; K-12

www.nps.gov/webrangers National Parks Services activities and facts; K – 12

www.nytimes.com/learning/students/index.html News stories, and activities; 6 - 12

www.pbs.org Public Broadcasting System (PBS), videos, news, schedule of TV shows, documentaries, science, history, the Arts; target population: Middle/high school+

www.pbskids.org PBS sponsored, videos, games, TV programs; elementary

http://school.discoveryeducation.com/homeworkhelp/homework_help_home.html videos and tutorials for basic mathematic operations; upper elementary/middle

<http://school.discoveryeducation.com/homeworkhelp/math/web-resources.html> Resources for help with algebra, geometry, trigonometry and calculus; middle/high

www.smithsonianeducation.org Activities in science, history, and art; elementary/middle

www.sproutonline.com PBS sponsored, activities, craft projects, Sesame workshop; preschool-K

www2.scholastic.com/browse/activities.jsp Activities by topic; Pre K - 8

www.timeforkids.com/TFK/ articles current and past; K - 6

www.webmath.com A help site for math problem; choose topic or level; K -12

www.weeklyreader.com/ Articles and activities; categorized for Kids and Teens

www.whitehouse.gov/kids Connects to the Whitehouse, write the President, government news, history of the Whitehouse; middle/high school

HELPFUL WEBSITES & TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Your Local Health Department:

(Find the number by visiting www.nysacho.org)

Other online resources:

www.nyhealth.gov

www.flu.gov

<http://usny.nysed.gov/swine-flu-info.html>

www.security.state.ny.us/preparedness/

www.nysed.gov

www.schoolhealthservicesny.com

www.ready.gov

www.redcross.org

New York State Department of Health H1N1 Flu Hotline:

1-800-808-1987

New York City residents call 311

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Information Line:

1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)

1-888-232-6348 (TTY)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The NYSDOH will provide updated guidance as additional information and CDC recommendations become available. Frequently updated information is posted on the NYSDOH website at http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/communicable/influenza/h1n1/information_for_schools.htm

Frequently updated information is available on the CDC website at http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general_info.htm or www.flu.gov

The New York State Education Department provides guidance, support, and direction to administrators, faculty, staff, and the school community. A compilation of all H1N1 information provided by NYSDOH and NYSED is posted at <http://usny.nysed.gov/swine-flu-info.html>

The New York Statewide School Health Service Center provides guidance and support to school health professionals. Frequently updated information is posted at <http://www.schoolhealthservices.org/>

Links and contact information for your local (county) health department is available at <http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/lhu/map.htm>

English and Spanish educational materials are available below and include:

- [Influenza \(H1N1 and Seasonal\) Educational Materials Order Form](#)
- [Got the flu? Here's what to do: Ask for a mask! \(poster\)](#)
 - Spanish – [¿Tiene la gripe? Sepa lo que debe hacer: pida una mascara \(cartel\)](#)
- [Keep Your Germs to Yourself! \(pocket card\)](#)
 - Spanish – [Quédese con sus microbios: No salga de su casa y evite el contacto directo con los demás \(folleto\)](#)
- [Stop! Do you have Fever? Cough? Trouble breathing? Please tell the staff immediately! \(poster\)](#)
 - Spanish – [Alto - Aviso Importante Para Todos Los Pacientes Tiene Usted - Fiebre? Tos? Problemas? Para Respirar? \(cartel\)](#)
- [Visitors are welcome ... but the flu is NOT! \(poster\)](#)
 - Spanish – [Las visitas son bienvenidas ...La gripe NO! \(cartel\)](#)
- [Keep your Germs to Yourself! \(poster\)](#)
 - Spanish – [¡Quédese con sus Microbios! \(cartel\)](#)
- [What to do? - When someone at home has the flu \(brochure\)](#)
 - Spanish – [¿Qué se debe hacer? cuando alguien en la casa tiene gripe \(folleto\)](#)

- [Keep our School Healthy \(poster\)](#)
 - Spanish – [¡De usted depende parar la gripe! \(cartel\)](#)
- [Keep our School Healthy \(poster\)](#)
 - Spanish – [Mantengamos la escuela sana \(cartel\)](#)
- [Keep Your Germs to Yourself - Stay Home and avoid close contact with others \(poster\)](#)