



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Governor

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Commissioner

May 6, 2009

TO: District Superintendents
Charter School Leaders

FROM: Lucille E. Davy
Commissioner

SUBJECT: H1N1 Influenza A (swine flu) Advisory

The purpose of this memo is to update you on the current situation in New Jersey regarding H1N1 Influenza A (also known as swine flu). I also want to provide you with additional information from DOE and the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) that will be helpful in answering questions from parents and others in your community.

Matters covered in this memo include:

- Statewide Update.
- New CDC Guidance on School Closures.
- When Children and Staff Should Stay Home.
- Information for Parents and Guardians.
- Communication with County Offices and Local Health Officials.
- Reducing the Risk of H1N1.

Statewide Update:

First, please be assured that while there is cause for concern about H1N1, there is no cause for alarm at this point. To date, there have been seven confirmed cases of the virus in New Jersey. Four of those cases are school-age children. All of the individuals had mild cases; none was hospitalized and all are recovering.

DHSS is carefully tracking the H1N1 Influenza A (swine flu) virus and will continue to monitor how the disease is spreading to better understand the outbreak. For the most current information on H1N1 in New Jersey, please visit the DHSS web site at <http://nj.gov/health/er/h1n1/>.

New CDC Guidance on School Closures:

On Tuesday, May 5, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) revised its guidance on the closure of schools and childcare facilities where there are reported cases of the H1N1 flu virus.

In prior guidance documents, the CDC had recommended that districts consider closure for seven days (and later 14 days) as an option to lessen the risk of infection should their be confirmed cases of H1N1 in a school. Given new information that indicates that most US cases are comparable in severity to seasonal influenza, **the CDC is now recommending that school closure “is not advised unless there is a magnitude of faculty or student absenteeism that interferes with the school’s ability to function.”**

The new guidance also includes information on school cleaning procedures. Please visit the CDC website at http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/?s_cid=h1n1Flu_outbreak_037 to view the new guidance and related information. You should check the CDC site periodically, as the guidance may be modified again.

When Students and Staff Should Stay Home:

At this time, DHSS and local health departments have advised us that students can continue to attend school and staff members can continue to report to work as long as they are not sick and do not have flu-like symptoms. However, if students or staff members are experiencing any flu-like symptoms, it is important that they remain home and stay away from other people for seven days after the onset of the symptoms or longer if they still have symptoms. Flu-like symptoms include fever (over 100 degrees Fahrenheit), cough, sore throat and a runny or stuffy nose. Additional symptoms can include muscle pain, fatigue, and sometimes vomiting or diarrhea.

Information for Parents and Guardians:

I have attached a letter from DOE and DHSS for you to provide to parents and guardians. A Spanish-language version of the letter is also attached. Please disseminate these letters as broadly as possible by posting it on your district and community websites and sending it to the local media.

Communication with Local Health Officials and County Offices:

In order to address any health-related issues that may arise due to cases of H1N1 in your district, it is important that you establish a strong working relationship with your local and county health officials. I am also encouraging you to maintain regular contact with your Executive County Superintendent to address education issues should this situation change.

Reducing the Risk of H1N1:

As we discussed during our conference calls last week, I want to re-emphasize the importance of having students and staff practice effective preventive measures to reduce the risk of getting the flu and protect others from infection. I know that many of you, with the help of your school nurses, are already providing information to students, staff and parents.

General tips for decreasing the spread of germs include:

- Washing your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze.
- Covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Throwing tissues in the trash after you use them.
- Using alcohol-based hand cleaners.
- Not touching your eyes, nose or mouth (germs are easily spread this way).

Finally, I urge you to please stay informed about H1N1 Influenza A by visiting the DHSS <http://www.state.nj.us/health/> and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov/flu/swine.

Should you have any questions, please call the DHSS toll-free hotline at 1-866-321-9571 or Anthony Bland, DOE's School Security Coordinator, at 609-633-6681.

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to keep school communities healthy and safe.

Attachments:

Letter to Parents and Guardians from Health and Senior Services Commissioner Heather Howard and Education Commissioner Lucille E. Davy (in English and Spanish).

- c: Principals
- School Nurses
- Executive County Superintendents
- NJLEE Group
- Garden State Coalition of Schools
- NJ School Nurses Association
- NJ State Nurses Association