



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

May 6, 2009

**To parents, students and staff of Connecticut schools,**

Probable and confirmed cases of novel H1N1 flu (swine flu) have been identified in Connecticut. We expect that with time, additional cases will be identified here and elsewhere in the country.

New information on disease severity prompted health experts to revise the school closure guidance that was initially published. The majority of U.S. cases have been less severe than initially reported from Mexico with fewer hospitalizations and deaths. CDC and local and state health officials will continue to closely monitor the severity and spread of this novel H1N1 influenza outbreak.

**The most important message at this time is not new: Students and adults who are sick should NOT come to school.** In particular, stay home if you have flu symptoms: fever and cough or sore throat, sometimes with runny or stuffy nose, body aches, vomiting or diarrhea. To avoid infecting others, please stay home and stay away from others for at least 7 days or until all symptoms have gone away for at least 24 hours, whichever is longer. Make decisions about when to seek medical care as you would under normal circumstances, and if you have flu symptoms, seek care if you have a fever for three or more days and seem to be getting sicker.

On May 5, 2009, CDC updated its guidance to reflect a more developed understanding of the H1N1 virus. Based on this information, CDC changed its recommendation to focus school-based efforts on early identification of ill students and staff, a recommendation to stay home when ill, and good cough and hand hygiene etiquette as the primary means to reduce spread of influenza in schools. Decisions about school closure should be at the discretion of local authorities based on local considerations, including public concern, the impact of school absenteeism, and staffing shortages.

Like other flu viruses, novel H1N1 flu spreads from an ill person to others mainly through coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with the virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose or rubbing their eyes. People with novel H1N1 flu are thought to be able to spread the infection to others for approximately 7 days after becoming sick.

Children and adults who are well and without symptoms of flu do not need to be excluded from school or work on the basis of recent travel to an area with novel H1N1 flu or close contact with someone with novel H1N1 flu. However such persons should closely monitor their health and should not attend school or work if they develop any symptoms. If symptoms develop while at school or work, arrange to return to home immediately.

**It is very important to teach our children what we all need to do to prevent spread of the virus:**

- **Avoid close contact with people who are sick.**
- **Cover your cough or sneeze** with the crook of your elbow or a tissue.
- **Wash your hands often with soap and water**, especially after you cough or sneeze. If water is not nearby, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.** Germs often spread this way.
- For more information, please see our attached
  - *Novel H1N1 flu (swine flu): Facts for families of school-aged children*
  - *Novel H1N1 flu (swine flu): When to keep your child home from school*

More information, including frequent updates, is available online:

- Connecticut Department of Public Health H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) web site: <http://www.ct.gov/ctfluwatch>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu>

Thank you for your cooperation in keeping our children and our schools healthy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Cartter".

Matthew L. Cartter, MD, MPH State Epidemiologist

## When to Keep Your Child at Home

### How can we limit the spread of H1N1 virus (swine flu)?

The most important thing is to keep sick people away from healthy people. So if your child is sick, you must keep your child home. Staying home when sick stops the spread of the flu and helps the sick person get well.

### Answer these questions every morning before sending your child to school or daycare:

1. Does your child have a **fever** (100° F or 37. 7°C)? If you don't have a thermometer, feel your child's skin with your hand. If it is much warmer than usual your child probably has a fever.
2. Does your child have a **sore throat, cough, body aches, vomiting, or diarrhea**?

**If you answered “yes” to both questions above**, your child might have the flu. Keep your child home from school for 7 calendar days, or until symptoms are gone for 24 hours, whichever is longer.

**If you checked “yes” to only one of the questions above**, keep your child home from school until symptoms are gone for 24 hours.

### When should my child go to the doctor?

Call your health care provider if your child is ill enough that you would normally see a health care provider. Use the same judgment you would use during a normal flu season. If you would not usually see a health care provider for the symptoms your child has now, you do not need to see a health care provider.

### For more information and on-going updates:

- Connecticut Department of Public Health H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) web site: <http://www.ct.gov/ctfluwatch>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu>

## **Novel H1N1 flu (swine flu): Facts for families of school-aged children**

**What is novel H1N1 flu (swine flu)?** Novel H1N1 flu, also known as “swine flu,” is a virus that can spread from people who are infected to others through coughs and sneezes. Novel H1N1 virus is not transmitted from pigs to humans or from eating pork products.

**What should we do if someone in my family has symptoms? Stay home** if you have flu symptoms: fever and cough or sore throat, body aches, vomiting or diarrhea. Please stay away from others until you are better for at least one day so you won’t infect people around you. Make the decision to see a health care provider as you would when you are sick. Do not seek medical care if you are not ill or have mild symptoms for which you would not ordinarily seek medical care. If you feel sick enough to see a doctor, call your health care provider.

**Why did some schools close?** At the onset of this outbreak of a previously unknown influenza virus, we believed it prudent to close affected schools while we learned more about the characteristics of this new illness and the strategy for community measures to prevent illness. The closures have provided valuable time for us to gather information about this novel H1N1 influenza strain in our community. We appreciate the sacrifices families and schools have made to protect the health of the community during this early stage of the outbreak.

**Will schools continue to close?** Schools will no longer be advised to close based on the diagnosis of a probable or confirmed case of novel H1N1 flu. As with seasonal influenza, schools may be closed if larger numbers of students or faculty become ill. School closure appears less necessary given what we are observing about the spread of disease and the severity of illness currently associated with this novel H1N1 strain.

**My child’s school has reopened but my child just became ill, what should I do?** When school re-opens, students and staff with fever, cough or sore throat or other new respiratory illness **should not attend school** for 7 calendar days after the illness starts or until 24 hours after the illness is over, whichever is longer.

**How do I protect my children and family from infection?** Teach children to:

- **Wash your hands often with soap and water**, especially after you cough or sneeze. If soap and water are not nearby, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- **Cover your nose and mouth** with a tissue or the crook of your elbow when you cough or sneeze.
- **Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.** Germs often spread this way.
- **Stay away from people who are sick.**

**Where can I get more information?**

- Connecticut Department of Public Health novel H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) web site: <http://www.ct.gov/ctfluwatch>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu>