

To Parents and Guardians of Pennsylvania's Students:

In the spring of 2009, a new flu strain (known as pandemic influenza A/H1N1 or swine flu) appeared and quickly spread throughout the United States. Schools in Pennsylvania were impacted and a number had to close briefly due to the virus spreading so quickly. With the cooperation of our parents, we were able to minimize the overall impact of the flu virus.

Over the course of the summer, this new flu strain continued to produce illness in Pennsylvania, although not at the levels witnessed in May and June.

To combat this new flu strain, we plan to continue many of the measures previously put in place to protect your children. Additionally, new guidance from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now stipulates that a student with the flu will need to stay home until they are fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications (Tylenol, Motrin, etc.). In most cases, this would be anywhere from three to five days where your child would be kept home from school.

Your school will be taking steps to reduce the spread of infections like the flu. Frequent hand washing will be encouraged, and surfaces that are frequently touched or handled will be regularly cleaned and disinfected. If a child is sick, you will be contacted to take your child home.

While school closure will remain an option, our current recommendations are to take such an action only if there is evidence that other measures are not working. School districts will work closely with their local and state health departments in making decisions. Each situation will be individually evaluated to assure the best course of action is taken to protect the children and school staff as well as minimize the burden and impact on affected families.

Many of you have questions about the availability and use of vaccines. Recently, persons between ages five and 24 were identified as a priority group to receive the vaccine against the new flu strain. The Department of Health estimates the first doses of the new vaccine will be available in October and details of distribution of the vaccine will be forthcoming.

We also expect to see illness due to the seasonal (or regular) flu in the coming fall and winter. The seasonal flu vaccine has been recommended for all school-aged children and is especially important for children with underlying health problems (like asthma and diabetes), since these conditions increase the risk for flu complications. Therefore, we encourage all parents to have their children annually vaccinated against seasonal flu. This vaccine will be available in the early fall, but it will **not** protect against the swine flu strain.

Information on the flu, and how you can protect your family, is available at www.health.state.pa.us, www.cdc.gov and www.flu.gov. For further information, contact your child's school, your local health department, the Pennsylvania Department of Health at 1-877-PA-HEALTH.

Your child's health and education are very important, and we hope to partner with you during the school year to assure that both are achieved at the highest levels. Thank you for your assistance.