

H1N1 Influenza Update

With the recognition of novel H1N1 influenza virus in New York State in May 2009, elementary and secondary schools began working collaboratively with state and local health departments and the State Education Department to share important data on student absenteeism and illness. This vital monitoring and information sharing will be extremely important for the 2009-2010 school year.

To date, most people affected with the novel 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 your family vaccinated for seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu when vaccines are available.

Families, students, and school staff can keep from getting sick with flu in three ways:

- Practicing good hand hygiene. Students and staff members should wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Practicing respiratory etiquette. 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.
- Staying home if you are sick. Keeping sick students at home means that they keep their viruses to themselves rather than sharing them with others. A goal of perfect attendance for your child may not be practicable this year.

Students, staff, and their families must take personal responsibility for helping to slow the spread of the virus by practicing these steps to keep from getting sick with flu and protecting others from getting the flu.

- Plan for child care at home if your child gets sick or their school is dismissed (for a minimum of 5 school days).
- Plan to monitor the health of the sick child and any other children by checking for fever and other symptoms of flu.
- Update emergency contact lists.
- Identify a separate room in the house for care of sick family members. Consider designating a single person as the main caregiver for anyone who gets sick.
- Be sure to note school information and notices regarding emergency plans, school closing notifications, and/or immunization information.

NYSDOH H1N1 UPDATE

Current key findings from flu monitoring systems in New York State (NYS) for the week ending September 26, 2009, include:

- The overall level of flu activity is currently low and appears to be slightly increasing when compared to last week.
- The number of people hospitalized with flu is currently low and appears to be slightly increasing when compared to last week.
- The number of people dying with flu is currently none reported.

For additional information please see their Influenza Surveillance page at:

<http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/communicable/influenza/surveillance/2009-2010/>