



Mississippi State Department of Health
Mississippi Department of Education

Dear School Principals,

Novel H1N1 (swine) flu has been diagnosed in children attending schools across the state. So far, this influenza illness is no more severe than the seasonal influenza that usually occurs in the winter and early spring months. Typical illness includes fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea. As with any typical influenza season, school staff and student absenteeism due to flu can disrupt day-to-day activities and impact learning.

Common sense approaches to infection control in school settings are important means to slow the spread of influenza during any influenza season, not only during an influenza pandemic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has developed and provided a guide to help schools respond to influenza during the 2009-2010 school year. This guide is available on the CDC website at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/schoolguidance.htm>

The recommendations emphasize the importance of the basic foundations of influenza prevention: stay home when sick, wash hands frequently with soap and water when possible, and cover noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or a shirt sleeve or elbow if no tissue is available). The key points of this guidance are attached for you to provide to your teachers and staff.

At this time, based on surveillance data at the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH), almost all of the influenza that is going around is the novel H1N1 (swine) flu. Testing is not necessary for treatment decisions nor for decisions about staying home from school. Please do not require a doctor's note for students or employees who are ill with influenza-like illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as doctor's offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and may not be able to provide such documentation in a timely way.

Vaccination is another way to prevent flu. MSDH is anticipating novel H1N1 (swine) flu vaccine to be available by mid-October. Your school will be contacted by your local Public Health District to discuss the best way to vaccinate the children in your schools, either through the local health department or onsite vaccination clinics. In addition, all students and staff should be encouraged to receive vaccination for regular seasonal flu.

MSDH will continue to monitor the spread of influenza illness in the state, and provide schools with updates and guidance as it becomes available. If you have specific questions, please contact your local Public Health District office, or the MSDH hotline at 1-877-222-9FLU (1-877-222-9358).



F. E. Thompson, Jr., MD, MPH
State Health Officer, MS



John W. Jordan, EdD
Interim State Superintendent of
Schools, MS

Key Points to Prevent the Spread of Flu in Schools

- Basic infection control in school settings should always be promoted and maintained.
- **Stay home when sick** - Those with flu-like illness (fever, cough, sore throat, body aches and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea) should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines. They should stay home even if they are using antiviral drugs. Please do not require a doctor's note or lab testing for students or employees who are ill with influenza-like illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as doctor's offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and may not be able to provide such documentation in a timely way.
- **Separate ill students and staff** - Students and staff who appear to have flu-like illness should be sent to a room separate from others until they can be sent home. CDC recommends that they wear a surgical mask, if possible, and that those who care for ill students and staff wear protective gear such as a mask.
- **Hand hygiene** - CDC recommends that students and staff be encouraged to wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. If soap and water are unavailable, alcohol hand sanitizers may be used instead.
- **Respiratory etiquette** - CDC recommends covering the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or a shirt sleeve or elbow if no tissue is available) and throwing the tissue in the trash after use, followed by hand washing.
- **Routine cleaning** - School staff should routinely clean areas that students and staff touch often with the cleaners they typically use. Special cleaning with bleach and other special cleaners is not necessary.