



*THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH*

August 31, 2009

TO: Massachusetts School Administrators, School Nurses, and Educators

FROM: John Auerbach, Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Mitchell Chester, Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

RE: **Seasonal and H1N1 Influenza – Back to School Update**

As the 2009-2010 school year begins, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) are committed to providing you with information and updates about H1N1 influenza, seasonal influenza, and influenza-like illness (ILI).

We are providing you updated information based on the most recent guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), whose *goals for the new school season are to prevent as many cases of the flu as possible and to keep schools open and functioning as usual*. The following documents are provided to assist you with surveillance and prevention in schools, and to assist with communication with parents:

- Fall 2009 Influenza Guidance for Schools
- Letter to Parents (Spanish and Portuguese versions are included)
- Information for Parents about Flu in Schools (Spanish and Portuguese versions are included)
- Flu Symptom Checklist for Families and Schools (Spanish and Portuguese versions are included)
- Educational Flyer

The most significant updates since the spring include: 1) the availability of seasonal flu vaccine in August; 2) the availability of H1N1 influenza vaccine (expected in October); and 3) perhaps most significant for schools, a shorter exclusion period for those with influenza-like illness (ILI). **The exclusion period has been changed to at least 24 hours after a child no longer has a fever without the use of fever-reducing medicines** like ibuprofen or acetaminophen. For many students, this will mean staying home for about 4 days.

CDC has developed *Preparing for the Flu: A Communication Toolkit for Schools (Grades K – 12)* which contains helpful, detailed information. Included are questions and answers, fact sheets, template letters and educational materials. This Toolkit should be considered an additional resource for you and is available at: <http://www.flu.gov/plan/school/>