

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS ----

Initial H1N1 Flu Outbreak #1: Use this letter to provide parents with early information.

To parents, students and staff of _____ schools,

As you have probably heard, cases of the new H1N1 influenza virus, also known as the "swine flu", have been identified within our school district. We expect that with time, additional cases will occur and begin to spread within the community and elsewhere in the state.

Like other flu viruses, the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus spreads from person to person mainly through coughs or sneezes of people who are ill. 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 swine flu are thought to be able to spread the infection to others for approximately seven days after becoming sick.

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 keep sick children at home and away from others until their fever has resolved for at least one day without the use of fever-lowering medications, like acetaminophen or ibuprofen. 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.

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 H1N1 flu or close contact with a suspected or confirmed case of flu. However such persons should closely monitor their health and should not attend school 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 coughs and sneezes 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 near, 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 "Frequently Asked Questions" and the "Swine Flu: A Guide for Parents." Additional information is available by visiting the OSDH Web site at <http://h1n1.health.ok.gov> and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site at www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu , or by calling your local county health department.

It is not possible to predict if the swine flu outbreak in the United States will remain mild or become worse, and in the upcoming days and weeks we will have more information and we'll share it with you. Let's all do our part to prevent the spread of this illness in our community. Thanks for your support.

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, runny nose, 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 until symptoms are gone for 24 hours without the use of medications such as Tylenol, Motrin, etc.

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:

- Fact sheet: "H1N1 virus (swine flu) Facts for Families of School-age Children"
- OSDH Web site at <http://h1n1.health.ok.gov>.

Swine flu: Facts for Families of School-age Children

What is swine flu (H1N1 flu)?

The H1N1 influenza virus, also known as "swine flu," is a virus that can spread from people who are infected to others through coughs and sneezes. When people cough or sneeze, they spread germs through the air or onto surfaces that other people may touch. People with swine flu are thought to be able to spread the infection to others for approximately 7 days after becoming sick. The H1N1 flu virus is not transmitted from pigs to humans or from eating pork products. However, people who are sick with the H1N1 virus can spread it to pigs and pet ferrets, so persons with flu should avoid direct contact with these animals.

What should we do if someone in my family has symptoms?

Stay home if you have flu symptoms: fever and cough or sore throat, sometimes with runny or stuffy nose, 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 normally would during a typical flu season. 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 have more severe symptoms of fever, cough, sore throat, body aches or are feeling more seriously ill, call your health care provider to discuss your symptoms and if you need to be evaluated.

If the following flu-like symptoms are mild, **medical attention is not typically required.**

- Runny nose or nasal stuffiness
- Low-grade fever for less than 3 days
- Mild headache
- Body aches
- Mild stomach upset

If someone in the home is pregnant, is an infant less than 6 months old, or has a medical condition that affects the heart, lungs or immune system, contact your physician to find out if antiviral medications should be prescribed to protect them from getting the flu.

Why did some schools close last spring because of H1N1 flu?

At the onset of this national outbreak of a previously unknown influenza virus, some officials believed it prudent to close affected schools while more was learned about the characteristics of this new illness and the strategy for community measures to prevent illness. The closures were intended to decrease spread of infection in the schools and provided valuable time to gather information about this new H1N1 influenza virus strain.

Will schools be closed during the 2009-10 school year due to swine flu?

Schools will not be routinely closed by county or state public health officers on the basis of a diagnosis of a few probable or confirmed cases of H1N1 virus (swine flu) within the school district. As is our practice with seasonal influenza, schools may be closed if larger numbers of students or faculty become ill. School closure appears less necessary at this point in the outbreak given what we are observing about the spread of disease and the severity of illness currently associated with this H1N1 strain. As the illness becomes more common in the community, closing individual schools based on reports of one or two diagnosed cases is less effective as a control measure.

What are the best options for child care if my child's school is closed?

To avoid spreading illness, avoid bringing large groups of children together. If childcare centers or schools close, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advises families to work

together with two or three other families to provide care for a group of five or fewer children. CDC also suggests using the same caregivers each day to watch over the same group of children. Please plan **now** for how you will care for your children if they get sick with the flu. Share these plans with your employer.

My child's school is closed due to swine flu and my child is ill, what should I do?

If your child is ill with a fever, cough or sore throat, he or she should avoid contact with others and remain at home until his/her fever is gone for a full day without the use of fever-lowering medications.

If the child's symptoms are mild, he or she does not need to see a health care provider.

If symptoms are more severe, call your health care provider to discuss if you need to bring your child for medical evaluation. Remember to tell your healthcare provider about the school closure for an outbreak of H1N1 influenza.

My child's school has reopened but my child just became ill, what should I do?

When school re-opens, the school will be closely tracking additional cases of H1N1 flu so be sure to tell school administration about the nature of your child's illness. As before, students and staff with fever, cough or sore throat or other new respiratory illness should not attend school until the illness is over for a full day.

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

- **Wash hands often with soap and water**, especially after coughing or sneezing. If soap and water are not nearby, use an alcohol-based hand gel.
- **Cover nose and mouth** with a tissue or the crook of their elbow when coughing or sneezing. Throw away tissues immediately after use and wash hands.
- **Try not to touch eyes, nose, or mouth.** Germs often spread this way.
- **Stay away from people who are sick.**

Where can I get more information?

Contact your child's school for school closure updates.

Additional information and updates on swine flu are available on the following Web sites:

- OSDH Web site at <http://h1n1.health.ok.gov>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu