

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health

August 31, 2009

TO: Parents and Guardians of School-Age Youth in Massachusetts

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

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

As a parent, you want to do everything possible to protect your children from the flu. This is especially important when a new flu virus like H1N1 flu is spreading. As you may know, flu can be easily spread from person to person. It's important to remember that *any* flu virus can cause serious illness. We expect to see both seasonal flu and H1N1 flu this fall. During the spring H1N1 flu outbreak, school-age youth were the most affected group. So as the new school year begins, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) are planning for how to keep students healthy and schools open. DPH and DESE pledge to give you the most up-to-date information about the situation, based on the most recent guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, who we work with very closely.

We want to work together with you to protect the health of students and provide the education they deserve. We will do this by preventing of the spread of the flu in schools and keeping schools open. Much of what we need to do has not changed since the spring of 2009. However there are some important changes.

- One of the main ways we can prevent the flu is by giving children flu shots against both types of flu.
 - Your child can get a **seasonal flu shot** as soon as possible, possibly starting in early September.
 - Your child should be able to get an **H1N1 flu shot** beginning in October.
- Children who have flu-like illness, will have to stay home from school for a shorter period of time than they did last spring. **Children should be kept home for least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever** without the use of fever reducing medicines like Motrin, Advil, Tylenol or a store brand. For most children, this will be about 4 days.

Included with this letter are two documents to help you with the flu this fall. They are the *Flu Symptom Checklist for Families and Schools* and *Information for Parents about Flu in Schools*. We will be sharing all of the same information with doctors and your local boards of health. It is important that we all understand what we need to do to protect our children from the flu and how to take care of them if they do get sick.

Thank you for your help and cooperation in keeping our children and our schools healthy.