

City of Newton



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Mayor

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

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Dear Newton Public School families:

The H1N1 (swine) influenza will continue to be a public health challenge in the upcoming school year. State and federal public health authorities believe that the disease will be easy to catch and will cause mild illness in most people. It is expected to continue to affect children more than adults. This makes influenza prevention and control measures particularly important in our schools.

New guidelines are in place to help prevent and control the spread of H1N1 influenza. We ask for your support by following these guidelines which will help to keep our students and staff healthy and learning this school year.

If your child is sick

Do not send a sick child to school. S/he will be sent home. Please call your child's school to report absence for any reason, especially for influenza-like illness. During this H1N1 influenza pandemic, school nurses will track illness in the schools, so it is important to know if your child's absence is due to influenza-like illness.

New 24-hour post-fever exclusion

Students, faculty and staff with influenza-like illness (ILI) may not return to school until they are fever free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medicine. Influenza-like illness means fever greater than 100.4 degrees F plus cough or sore throat. Other symptoms may include runny nose, body aches, headache, chills, feeling tired, and in some people, diarrhea and vomiting.

The 24-hour exclusion policy is a change from the seven-day exclusion period in effect during the spring. This guideline is similar to the policy for returning to school after other illnesses such as strep throat or seasonal influenza. The Newton Public Schools illness policy is found in the Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook available online at www.newton.k12.ma.us.

Mask use & picking up sick children

Students and staff with influenza-like illness will be dismissed from school. In accordance with state and federal guidelines, face masks may be used in the school health rooms for people with influenza-like illness. Sick students may wear a mask until a parent/guardian arrives for pickup. This measure will protect other people who are around the sick student. Sick students will be isolated as much as is possible while waiting for pickup, so it is essential that parents provide current contact information and arrive promptly if called by the school nurse.

Please make arrangements now should your child become ill during the school day for any reason. He or she will need to be picked up promptly and cared for at home for the duration of the illness. Consider stocking up on supplies such as a digital thermometer, fluids and fever-

reducing medicine. You can find important information in *Flu: What You Can Do, Caring For People at Home*, a booklet that can be obtained in your school nurse's office or from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) website at www.mass.gov/dph/flu

Surveillance and school closure

School nurses will closely monitor absences every day. We will consider closing a school if the operation of the school is impacted because of significant absence among staff and students. This policy is based on federal and state guidelines intended to keep school buildings open and to continue the educational process as long as it is safe and reasonable to do so.

H1N1 vaccine

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is expected to make recommendations this month about administering the H1N1 vaccine. The Newton Health & Human Services Department anticipates offering this vaccine to students and staff in accordance with the target groups established by CDC and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. More information about these target groups is available at www.cdc.gov/flu.

The H1N1 vaccine is expected to begin arriving in October and will continue coming until demand is met. It is likely two doses of H1N1 vaccine, given separately, will be required for full protection. This voluntary immunization will be free of charge and is expected to be offered at clinics after school and in the evening. Middle and High School students may be able to receive the vaccine during school hours. A signed parent/guardian consent form is required to immunize children, unless a parent or guardian is present.

Seasonal influenza vaccine

There is a different vaccine that is required to protect against the seasonal flu. It *does not* provide protection against H1N1 influenza. The CDC recommends that children 6 months through 18 years old receive seasonal influenza vaccine every year. Newton Public Middle and High School students will be offered the seasonal flu vaccine for a fee during the school day in October. More information about the seasonal influenza vaccine program and how to sign your child up will be provided by your school nurse, through email and posted on the city's website this month. There are many places to receive a seasonal flu vaccine in and around Newton. Visit www.newtonma.gov/flu to find nearby clinic locations.

Additional prevention measures

Influenza is spread primarily when an infected person coughs and sneezes. Frequent hand washing and avoiding touching the eyes, nose and mouth, helps to prevent catching the flu. School nurses teach children proper hand washing and cough/sneeze etiquette (into arm instead of hands). Parents can reinforce these good habits at home. Waterless hand sanitizer is available at schools. School staff will encourage frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizers.

Where to find updates

Your child's school nurse is available to answer questions and clarify health information. Health department staff members are available to answer additional questions at (617) 796-1420. Local updates and links to detailed information can be found on the city's website at www.newtonma.gov/flu. Urgent information would be disseminated through Connect-Ed messages.


Commitment and collaboration

The Newton Public Schools and the Health & Human Services Department are working together to ensure the health and safety of our students and staff. This collaboration extends to the families of our students as we all strive to ensure that our schools provide a healthy learning environment for our children.

Sincerely,



J. David Naparstek, Commissioner
Health & Human Services Department



V. James Marini, Superintendent
Newton Public Schools