



September 16, 2009

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Attached with this letter, in three separate handouts, are state issued guidelines regarding seasonal and H1N1 flu. There is quite a bit of information included in this material, and I do hope you will take some time to look them over. As you do this, **I do want to emphasize the importance of the following four points:**

- 1. acquiring seasonal and H1N1 vaccination;**
- 2. maintaining a culture of hygiene to minimize spread of illness;**
- 3. staying out of school and apart from others when sick; and,**
- 4. understanding when it is safe to come back to school.**

Almost two-thirds of verified cases of H1N1 to date have been individuals less than 18 years of age. The School Department will be working closely and collaboratively with the local health department to make sure we are doing what we can to help prevent the spread of influenza illness. But it is critical to have your support and collaboration as well to ensure that we as a community are as successful as we can be in this important endeavor.

Please note one very significant change to the guidelines regarding how long one should stay out of school after acquiring a flu-like illness. **For grades K through 12, students may now return to school after being fever free for 24 hours without the use of any fever-reducing agent. However, also note, the seven-day exclusion rule from onset of symptoms remains the guideline for the preschool.** It remains very important to keep your child home when he or she exhibits flu symptoms for the appropriate period of time.

Washing of hands with soap and water remains the recommended course for preventing the spread of illness in schools. While sinks are located in every elementary school classroom, a source of soap and water is not as readily handy in the Middle and High Schools. **For Middle and High School students, I am asking families to provide your children with a 60% alcohol based product they can keep with them at school.** Such product will be available in common office areas at all schools. Individual portions will also be available through the school nurse.

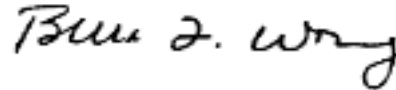
It will be very important for us to be able to monitor accurately the onset of influenza in our school community. **I ask that if you are keeping your child home from school for flu-like illness that you please let us know that when you call in to report an absence.** Please refer to the attached checklist to help guide you. In the past, our school nurses had to make many calls to obtain this information. This proved very challenging last spring and may be increasingly difficult to perform if the school nurses are faced with an increased number of school illnesses. I am asking for your assistance in this way to help us ensure accurate tracking. The better informed we are, the better we can then inform all of you and the Health Department of our shared status.

As sometimes happens, children will manifest flu-like symptoms while in school. The guidelines ask that we isolate these children to prevent spread. In many cases, physical isolation may be very difficult or impossible to achieve depending on how many children may be visiting the school nurse at any given time. **I want you to be aware that the school nurse may, at her discretion, ask a child to wear a small mask to cover his/her nose and mouth to reduce spread in close quarters.** At no time will a child be asked to wear a mask if it causes distress at all or if it cannot otherwise be tolerated.

Again, please take some time to review this letter and the attachments in preparation for the upcoming flu season. I will continue to send you updates as I receive them from the state and our own health department. The Wellesley Health Department will also be posting regular updates on their website at: www.wellesleyma.gov/health.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions you may have. While education is our mission, your children's health and safety is always our first priority.

Sincerely,



Bella T. Wong
Superintendent of Schools

CC: Wellesley Public School Staff
Ilissa Povich, Wellesley School Committee Chairman
Shepard Cohen, Wellesley Board of Health Chairman
Mary Suresh, Wellesley Director of Public Health

Attachments: Letter to Parents from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health
FAQ for Parents
Flu Symptom Check List