

Some things to know about the flu

During the spring of 2009 a new flu virus started making people sick in the United States and throughout the world. At first this illness was called “swine flu,” but now you may hear it called novel (new) H1N1 influenza. To date, most people effected with the novel H1N1 flu virus have experienced mild to moderate illness, similar to seasonal flu. However, the flu can be serious, and many more people may get the flu this school year.

What can you do?

- Get the seasonal flu vaccine now. It won't protect you from novel H1N1 flu, but seasonal flu is also circulating and can make you just as sick.
- Get the novel H1N1 flu vaccine as soon as it is available, according to the priority groups established by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Everyone should eventually be able to get the novel H1N1 flu vaccine, but those at highest priority are:
 - Pregnant women
 - Health care workers and emergency medical responders
 - People caring for infants under 6 months of age
 - Children and young adults from 6 months to 24 years
 - People aged 25 to 64 years with underlying medical conditions (e.g. asthma, diabetes)
- Sick kids should stay home! They should NOT go to school, work, or out in public. If you think you have the flu, you should stay home and away from others. Individuals with flu-like symptoms should remain home for at least 24 hours after fever has disappeared (without the use of fever-reducing medication).
- Practice healthy habits. Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze with a tissue – not your hand. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve. Wash hands often with soap and warm water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Wash and rub hands for 20 seconds – as long as it takes to sing Happy Birthday twice. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.

Flu in our school

We expect that some people in our school will get the flu. Treatment for the novel H1N1 flu is the same as for seasonal flu. Rest, fluids and medicine to reduce body aches and fever, are all that most of us need to recover. For people with certain underlying medical conditions, such as those with asthma and other chronic diseases, flu can be more serious, and these individuals should contact their health care provider.

About school closures

The H1N1 flu outbreak that first occurred in the spring of 2009 taught us that closing schools does not reduce the spread of the novel H1N1 flu. This flu moves too fast. That's why federal, state and local officials no longer recommend school closures due to the flu except in special circumstances. For example, some schools might close because of high student, faculty or staff absenteeism. Your family should plan what they will do if school is closed for a time.

More information about the flu is available at www.nyhealth.gov and www.flu.gov.

This information is brought to you by the New York State Department of Health, the New York State Education Department, and your local school.