

Dear Parents,

This letter is to inform you that state and local public health officials have increased monitoring for illness from a novel influenza A (H1N1) virus that is making people sick in several states, including Iowa. Despite probable cases of novel influenza A (H1N1) in Iowa, we believe students can safely attend classes, thus schools should remain open at this time.

At this time, the state and local health departments have advised us that students can continue to come to school, as long as they are not sick and do not think they have flu symptoms. Flu-like symptoms include: fever (over 100 degrees F.), cough, sore throat, runny nose, or stuffy nose. Additional symptoms may be experienced with novel influenza A (H1N1), including muscle pain, fatigue, and sometimes vomiting or diarrhea. If your child is experiencing even mild symptoms they should be kept at home and not sent to school or be out in other community or public settings. Please be aware that if your child develops symptoms while at school the school will be contacting you to immediately take your child home.

Flu spreads easily. If you suspect your child is getting the flu, it is important that he/she does not attend school or go anywhere else—such as group childcare, the mall, or sporting events—where other people could be exposed to flu germs. It is also important to teach your children how to reduce their risk of getting the flu and protect others from infection.

- Teach your children to wash their hands often. Washing with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds is ideal (that's about as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice).
- Teach your children the proper use of hand sanitizer. Gels, rubs, and hand wipes all work well, as long as they contain at least 60% alcohol. Hand wipes must be disposed of properly. Always read and follow label instructions when using hand sanitizer.
- Teach your children to keep their hands away from their face and avoid touching their mouth, nose, or eyes.
- Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of their elbow. Cough or sneeze into your sleeve—not your hands!
- Help your children to learn these healthy habits by setting a good example and always doing them yourself.

If we all practice these simple prevention measures, public health officials believe we can limit the spread of the novel influenza A (H1N1) virus in our school and community. We are consulting with local health officials regarding best cleaning practices for infection control in our buildings.

While the current situation does not warrant school closure, if novel influenza A (H1N1) continues to spread and more students become ill, it may become necessary to close schools for a period of time. We are working with our local public health officials to monitor the situation in Iowa and will make all decisions in consultation with local and state officials. We will inform parents immediately if the situation changes and it becomes necessary to close schools.

If schools are closed, please do not make arrangements—such as sending children to a friend's home or group childcare—that will put them in close contact with other children. They would need to stay home, so it is important to plan ahead. Have a family discussion now to consider options in advance of the event of a school closing.

You may also get information at www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/swine_flu.asp and www.cdc.gov or the 24 hour toll-free hotline at 1-800-447-1985.

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