

# WATERTOWN

30 Common Street Phone: 617-926-7700  
Fax: 617-923-1234



# Public Schools

Watertown, Massachusetts 02472-3492  
shiersche@watertown.k12.ma.us

STEVEN A. HIERSCHKE, Ed.D.  
*Superintendent*

April 29, 2009

Dear Parents,

As you probably know, the swine flu virus is making people sick in several states. We have now had 2 confirmed cases in Massachusetts. We understand that many people are worried and we hope this letter will help address your concerns.

## Is it safe for my child to go to school?

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 have flu symptoms. Flu-like symptoms include: fever (over 100 degrees F.), feverishness, cough, sore throat, runny nose, or stuffy nose. Additional symptoms may be experienced with swine flu, including muscle pain, fatigue, and sometimes vomiting or diarrhea. The Department of Public Health has a fact sheet on swine flu that is available on the DPH website, [www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu](http://www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu) in English and other languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Haitian Creole and Chinese.

## What should I do if my child is sick?

Flu spreads easily. **If you think your child is getting the flu, it is very important that he/she does not go to school or other places where they might make other people sick, such as group childcare, after school programs, the mall, or sporting events.** The Centers for Disease Control has an excellent guide on taking care of a sick person at home, [http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/guidance\\_homecare.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/guidance_homecare.htm).

## What can I do to keep my child from getting sick?

It is also important to teach your children how to reduce their risk of getting the flu and how to protect others from becoming infected.

- Teach your children to wash their hands often.** Washing with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds is ideal (that is 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.
- Teach your children to cough or sneeze into your sleeve—not their hands!** Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of their elbow. They should wash their hands after blowing their nose or coughing into a tissue.
- Teach your children to avoid touching their nose, mouth or eyes.** They should keep their hands away from their face. If we all practice good hygiene, health officials believe we can limit the spread of swine flu in our schools and child care centers.

## Will my child's school be closed if there is a case of swine flu there?

The current situation does not warrant school closure. School leaders and state and local health officials are closely monitoring the situation and we will inform parents immediately if the situation changes and your child's school must be closed. However, it is important to plan ahead. Have a family discussion now to decide who would care for your child if his/her school were closed.

## How can I keep track of what is going on in my community?

Please stay informed by getting up-to-date information on swine flu and what you can do to keep your family healthy from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health at [www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu](http://www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu), the national Centers for Disease Control website, [www.cdc.gov/swineflu/](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/) or the 24 hour toll-free hotline that Massachusetts residents can call for general information about swine flu. To reach the hotline, dial 211.

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