



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health

August 27, 2010

TO: Parents and Guardians of School-Age Youth in Massachusetts

FROM: John Auerbach, Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Mitchell Chester, Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

RE: **Influenza – Back to School Update**

We would like to thank you for the very successful and coordinated response to pandemic H1N1 influenza last year! By getting vaccinated, being careful about coughing and sneezing, washing hands regularly, and keeping children home when they were ill, we were able to keep children healthy and avoid most school closures and the disruption they cause. We could not have done this without your support and cooperation.

Influenza, including the pandemic H1N1 kind, is expected to be circulating in Massachusetts this fall and winter. Influenza causes a great deal of illness and many deaths every year, and can result in missed days of school and missed days of work. It can be a dangerous illness in very young children, and in children with chronic health problems that make them more likely to get very sick if they get the flu.

Much of what we need to do, to prepare for and to respond to the flu, has not changed since last year. However there are some important differences this year:

- **Flu vaccination (the shot or nasal spray) is now recommended for everyone 6 months of age or older.**
- This year's vaccine (shot or nasal spray) contains protection against both the pandemic H1N1 influenza and two other kinds of influenza.

Just like last year, children who have flu-like illness (fever with either cough or sore throat) should be kept home for least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever without the use of fever reducing medicines like Motrin, Advil, Tylenol or a store brand. For most children, this will be about 4 days.

We are including two documents to help you with the flu this year. They are the *Flu Symptom Checklist for Families and Schools* and *Information for Parents about Flu and Schools*. We will be sharing all of the same information with doctors and your local boards of health. It is important that we all understand what we need to do to protect our children from the flu and how to take care of them if they do get sick.

**Thank you for your help and cooperation in keeping our children and our schools healthy.
For more information about flu, go to mass.gov/flu**