

Diocese of Worcester H1N1 (swine flu) Preparedness Response Guidelines

Background:

The guidelines below were developed in collaboration with School Administrators and the Catholic Schools Office. They are consistent with the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the U.S. Department of Education, and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MPDH) for preparing for and responding to the H1N1 virus. Please note that the new guidance puts an emphasis on persons who are ill staying home until they are no longer contagious rather than on closing schools.

Vaccinations:

- We recommend that students, faculty/staff and/or their families consult with their primary care providers with regard to receiving the H1N1 vaccination.
- We direct our constituents to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health for updates www.mass.gov/flu

Precautionary Measures:

- Good hygiene along with proper rest and diet remain the best precautionary steps for maintaining good health.
- Restrict the use of water fountains and encourage the use of bottled water.
- Encourage school nurses to offer school faculty and custodial staff training in precautionary measures to reduce the spread of H1N1.
- **Stay home when sick:** Those with flu-like illness should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines. They should stay home even if they are using antiviral drugs.
- **Separate ill students and staff:** Students and staff who appear to have flu-like illness should be sent to a room separate from others until they can be sent home. The use of masks to prevent spreading the virus while waiting to be sent home is at the discretion of the school administration.
- **Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette:** The new recommendations emphasize the importance of the basic foundations of influenza prevention: stay home when sick, wash hands frequently with soap and water when possible or use hand sanitizers, and cover noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or a shirt sleeve or elbow if no tissue is available).

- [Ensure that alcohol based hand rub or non-alcohol substitutes](#) are easily accessible to the school community and encourage their use at appropriate times. Make sure that sanitizers containing alcohol are used in an appropriate manner.
- [Routine cleaning](#): School faculty and custodial staff should routinely clean areas that students and staff touch often with the cleaners they typically use especially door knobs, key boards, desks, and tables. The Center for Disease Control does not believe any additional disinfection of environmental surfaces beyond the recommended routine cleaning is required.
- [Early treatment of high-risk students and staff](#): People at high risk for influenza complications who become ill with influenza-like illness should speak with their health care provider as soon as possible. Early treatment with antiviral medications is very important for people at high risk because it can prevent hospitalizations and deaths. People at high risk include those who are pregnant, have asthma or diabetes, have compromised immune systems, or have neuromuscular diseases.

Student Exclusions:

- Children with a fever of 100.4 degrees or more will not be allowed to remain at school.
- Children can return to school 24 hours after the fever is gone without using fever-reducing medicines.
- We recommend that administrators consult with local health officials to review their local policies.
- Students who are confined to home due to suspected infection with the H1N1 virus will not be allowed to participate in school sponsored activities.
- A doctor's note is not required before a child can return to school; however a doctor's note does not supersede these policy guidelines.

Faculty/Staff Exclusions:

- Faculty and staff with a fever of 100.4 degrees or more will not be allowed to remain at school.
- Faculty and staff will return to school 24 hours after the fever is gone without using fever-reducing medicines.

School Closings:

It is important to note that the intent of this response is to keep sick students and faculty at home and keep schools open.

- Individual schools, in collaboration with their Pastor (if applicable) and the Superintendent of Catholic Schools, will determine when to close and reopen the school to prevent the spread of H1N1. This decision will be made collaboratively taking into consideration the % of students and teachers absent and the ability of the school to continue to operate safely and effectively.
- In the event that the local public school district shuts down completely to prevent the spread of H1N1, individual schools will continue to follow the directives of the local cities and towns with regard to school closing and reopening due to H1N1.
- In the event that the public schools in the municipality are open, individual schools will make the determination to close and reopen in collaboration with their Pastor (if applicable) and the Superintendent of Catholic Schools.
- Schools closed to reduce the spread of H1N1 will cancel all school sponsored activities until school reopens.

Communications:

- Each school has unique protocols for communicating with parents and guardians regarding school closing and reopening. We ask that each school ensures that students, parents, and faculty are aware of the preferred method/s of communication and that they have access to the technology to support this communication.

Continuity of Learning:

- Each school has unique protocols for communicating with parents and students during prolonged absences to ensure continuity of learning. We ask that each school ensures that students, parents, and faculty are reminded of the importance of keeping abreast of the curriculum and that plans are in place to ensure continuity of learning for students.

Additional Support:

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