



Melrose Public Schools Administrative Offices

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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. As a district we take this matter seriously and are committed to maintaining a clean, safe and healthy environment as well as providing information to parents and staff regarding the scope, nature and steps we can take to keep everyone safe. We are committed to monitoring the children who come to school each day for flu-like symptoms. School personnel will serve as a resource for parents reminding children to follow recommended safety protocols as outlined below. The school nurse and principal will contact you if we have any concerns regarding your child and communicating to all parents, teachers and staff if conditions change or additional steps need to be taken.

Please know that the City Of Melrose and the Melrose Public Schools have a plan and protocols in place to deal with a crisis of this nature. We have met to review and update the plan to ensure coordination of all city and school functions with a focus on communication and providing for the continuity of services and core operations such as public safety, health and education. I understand that many people are worried and I 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 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. Please contact your healthcare provider to have your child tested.**

Students and staff with acute fever and/or respiratory illness, regardless of travel history, are advised to stay home. Students may be sent home, according to our current standard operating procedures, with instructions to stay at home for at least 7 days after the onset of illness or until 24 hours after their symptoms resolve, whichever is longer. 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.

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 especially after coughing or sneezing.** Washing with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds is ideal.

- **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 a tissue or the inside of their elbow—not their hands!** 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.

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

The current situation does not warrant school closure at this time, but we do have plans that allow for this option. Currently, I am working closely with the Director of the Melrose Health Department, the Office of Emergency Management, the Mayor as well as the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to closely monitor the situation and I 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?

Because this is a constantly changing situation, 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, the national Centers for Disease Control website, 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. For ongoing local updates, please check the Melrose Public Schools website, www.melroseschools.com.

Please see the attached Public Health Fact Sheet which provides additional information for your review. Thank you for your help and support in keeping our children, our schools and the Melrose community healthy.

Very truly yours,

Joseph F. Casey
Superintendent of Schools