



Michael R. Bloomberg  
Mayor

**Department of  
Health & Mental  
Hygiene**

Thomas Farley, MD, MPH  
Commissioner

**Department of  
Education**

Joel I. Klein  
Chancellor

September 2009

Dear Parent or Guardian,

We want to welcome you back to school and share some important information about our plans for this year's flu season. Influenza is a fact of life during the fall and winter months. In addition to ordinary seasonal flu, New York City may see a return of the H1N1 virus. We are confident neither of these viruses will disrupt the school year if we work together to control them.

We expect that an H1N1 vaccine will be available later this fall. The City will distribute the vaccine to health care providers, and plans to offer free vaccinations to school-age children. The current plan is to offer vaccinations to students in all NYC elementary schools—public and non-public—and to older children at central sites in each borough. The vaccination requires two doses, so each school or center will hold two vaccination sessions, approximately four weeks apart. Timing and logistics will depend on the supply of the H1N1 vaccine and the availability of staff to administer it. No child will be vaccinated without the consent of a parent or guardian. We will share details on this plan once it is finalized.

You may remember that when H1N1 began spreading last spring, we temporarily closed schools with large numbers of ill children and staff. Given what we now know about the virus and how it is spread, this school year the Department of Education and the Health Department are adopting an open school policy. This means that when the flu returns in the fall, we do not plan to close schools with high levels of flu activity. Instead, we will work with parents and other members of the school community to keep our schools open.

School nurses will use a citywide database to report the number of students with confirmed flu-like illness while at school, and the number of students with flu-like illness will be listed by school on the City's influenza website ([www.nyc.gov/flu](http://www.nyc.gov/flu)).

We are confident that routine infection-control measures are effective at preventing the spread of the flu and are less disruptive to families. The steps needed to control influenza in our schools are simple. By getting your children vaccinated, keeping them home when they're sick, and teaching them the importance of washing hands and covering coughs, you can help keep your children healthy this year. Here is a more detailed list of the steps we ask you to take.

- Get your child vaccinated against H1N1 and seasonal flu as soon as a vaccine is available.

- Teach your children to wash their hands often. Washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds is ideal (roughly the time it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song twice).
- Teach your children to keep their hands away from their faces and to avoid touching their mouth, nose, or eyes.
- Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or the inside of an elbow. Cough or sneeze into sleeves—not hands!
- Help children learn these healthy habits by setting a good example yourself.
- **Do not send your child to school if he or she has a fever with cough or sore throat.** Students kept home with flu-like symptoms should stay out of school until their symptoms are improving and their temperature is normal (98.6° F) for at least 24 hours. They will not need a doctor's note to return to school.
- Children sent home from school with a fever and a cough or sore throat will not be allowed to return to school until at least one full day has passed since they were dismissed.

If your child becomes ill during the school day, it is important we know how to reach you. Please remember to give your up-to-date contact information to your child's school. And be sure to inform your school nurse if your child has a chronic health condition, such as asthma or diabetes.

For more information about influenza and how to protect your family, you can always call 311 or visit [www.nyc.gov/flu](http://www.nyc.gov/flu).

Thank you in advance for doing your part to make this a healthy and productive school year for your children.

Sincerely,



Joel I. Klein  
Chancellor  
Department of Education



Thomas Farley, MD, MPH  
Commissioner  
Department of Health and Mental Hygiene