



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
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September 3, 2009

To Teachers of Pennsylvania's Students:

With the start of 2009-2010 school year upon us, your school district, the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Pennsylvania Department of Health want to discuss our preparations and plans for the upcoming influenza season. To lessen the flu's impact on you, your families and your students, we are committed to keeping you informed about the status of influenza throughout the commonwealth, and to help you better understand the need to plan in advance to safeguard your health.

Over the course of the summer, this new flu strain has continued to produce illness in Pennsylvania, although not at levels seen in May and June.

To combat this new flu strain, we plan to continue many of the measures previously put in place to protect our citizens. Additionally, new guidance from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now stipulates that anyone with the flu will need to stay home until they are fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications (Tylenol, Motrin, etc.). In most cases, this would be anywhere from three to five days where individuals would not be in the classroom.

We are asking all teachers to carefully observe your students. If you see a student who appears ill with influenza-like illness, please refer the student to the school nurse or other designated school official if the nurse is unavailable. If a student is found to be sick with flu-like symptoms, he or she will be sent home.

Your school will be taking steps to reduce the spread of infections like the flu. Frequent hand washing will be encouraged, and surfaces that are commonly touched or handled will be regularly cleaned and disinfected.

School closure will remain an option, but our current recommendations are to take such action only if there is evidence that other measures are not working. School districts will be working closely with their local and state health departments in making decisions. Each situation will be evaluated to guarantee the best course of action is taken to protect you and your students, minimizing the impact and burden on affected families and communities.

Many of you have questions about the availability and use of vaccines. Recently, persons between ages five and 24 were identified as a priority group to receive vaccine against the new

flu strain. Currently, the Department of Health estimates the first doses of the new vaccine will be available in October and details of distribution of the vaccine will be forthcoming.

We also expect to see illness due to the seasonal (or regular) flu in the coming fall and winter. The seasonal flu vaccine has been recommended for all school-aged children and is especially important for children with underlying health problems (like asthma and diabetes), since these conditions increase the risk of flu complications. Therefore, parents have been encouraged to have their children vaccinated and we also provide that same guidance to our teachers, administrators and all school staff to curb the spread of the seasonal flu.

Information on the flu and how you can protect your students and yourselves is available at www.health.state.pa.us, www.cdc.gov and www.flu.gov. For further information, contact your local health department or the Pennsylvania Department of Health at 1-877-PA-HEALTH.

Your health as well as the health of your students is very important to us, and we hope to partner with you during the school year to assure that both can be achieved.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerald L. Zahorchak". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G".

Gerald L. Zahorchak, D.Ed.