



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Catholic Schools Office of the Paterson Diocese

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SERVING PASSAIC, MORRIS and SUSSEX COUNTIES

September 17, 2009

Dear Parent,

As you may know, flu can be easily spread from person to person. Therefore, we are taking steps to reduce the spread of flu in our elementary and secondary schools in the Diocese of Paterson. We want to keep our schools open to students and functioning in a normal manner during this flu season. **But, we need your help to do this.**

We are working closely with county and local health departments to monitor flu conditions and make decisions about the best steps to take concerning schools. We will keep you updated with new information, as it becomes available.

If the flu becomes more severe, we may take additional steps to prevent the spread such as:

- conducting active fever and flu symptom screening of students and staff as they arrive at school,
- making changes to increase the space between people such as moving desks farther apart and postponing class trips, and
- dismissing students from school for at least 7 days if they become sick.

For now we are doing everything we can to keep our schools functioning as usual. Here are a few things you can do to help to keep from getting sick and from spreading the flu.

- **Practice good hand hygiene.** Teach your children to wash their hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. You can set a good example by doing this yourself.
- **Practice respiratory etiquette.** Teach your children not to share personal items like drinks, food or unwashed utensils, and to cover their coughs and sneezes with tissues. Covering up their coughs or sneezes using the elbow, arm or sleeve instead of the hand when a tissue is unavailable.
- **Know the signs and symptoms of the flu.** Symptoms of the flu include fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit, 37.8 degrees Celsius or greater), cough, sore throat, a runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, and feeling very tired. Some people may also vomit or have diarrhea.
- **Keep sick children at home** for at least 24 hours *after* they no longer have fever or do not have signs of fever, without using fever-reducing drugs. Keeping children with a fever at home will reduce the number of people who may get infected.
- **Do not send children to school if they are sick.** Any children who are determined to be sick while at school *will be sent home.*

Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people), and serious problems from the flu can happen at any age. This is why school students, staff and their families must take personal responsibility for helping to slow the spread of the virus by practicing these steps to keep from getting sick with flu and protecting others from getting the flu.

It is important to remember that school action steps will vary based on the severity of the pandemic and the impact it is having in the school. Decisions for school dismissal will be made at the community level with guidance from the local health department and my office, based on the number and severity of cases in the school and community. Because the impact of flu on a community will differ from location to location, the steps that are taken will also be different.

What can a parent do to prepare for flu during the 2009-2010 school year? **Based on CDC recommendations**, a parent should:

- Plan for child care at home if your child gets sick or their school is dismissed (for a minimum of 5 school days).
- Plan to monitor the health of the sick child and any other children by checking for fever and other symptoms of flu.
- Update Emergency Contact lists at your school with current contact numbers.
- Identify a separate room in the house for care of sick family members. Consider designating a single person as the main caregiver for anyone who gets sick.
- Pull together games, books, DVDs and other items to keep your family entertained while at home.
- Talk to your school principal about his/her flu pandemic or emergency plan.
- Get your family vaccinated for seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu when vaccines are available.

For more information:

- See the attached information sheets prepared by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
 1. *Action Steps for Parent to Protect Your Child and Family from the Flu this School Year*
 2. *Action Steps for Parents of Children at High Risk for Flu Complications*
 3. *Action Steps for Parents if School is Dismissed or Children are Sick and Must Stay Home*
- Visit www.flu.gov
- Contact CDC 24 hours/every day
Toll free number: 1 (800) CDC-INFO (232-4636)
TTY: (888) 232-6348
Email: cdcinfo@cdc.gov

Continue to monitor CDC's website for information about the flu. CDC will continue to update the website and guidance recommendations daily as more is learned about the 2009 H1N1 influenza and as flu conditions change. CDC will also look at the geographic spread of flu-like illness and will look for changes in the characteristics of the virus. By comparing data on a weekly basis with seasonal flu trends

and trends from the 2009 H1N1 flu during the spring, CDC will be able to provide advice to state and local agencies on appropriate steps to take.

For more information about flu in your local community, visit your local health department website or contact your local health department office via phone for local influenza updates, Town Hall Question and Answer sessions/meetings and ways you can volunteer to help in your community.

Please know that your school principal will notify you of any additional changes to your school's strategy to prevent the spread of flu. Thank you again for partnering with your school and for taking personal responsibility for helping to slow the spread of the influenza virus through good health practices both in and outside of home.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Eriksen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John Eriksen
Superintendent of Schools
Diocese of Paterson