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 Commissioner
 Department of Health

NEW YORK STATE
 David A. Paterson, Governor

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 Commissioner
 Office of Children & Family Services

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Dear Provider:

The human swine flu (H1N1) outbreak continues to grow in the United States and internationally, causing many of the children, families, providers, and agencies served by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to worry.

The best way to manage that anxiety is to share with each of you what we've learned so far from the state Department of Health, which has been providing OCFS with regular updates since Governor David A. Paterson announced on Sunday that he had activated the state's health emergency preparedness plan and put the state on high alert to quickly identify and respond to any cases of swine flu.

In New York State, 51 cases of the swine flu have been confirmed by laboratory tests and two schools in central Queens have been closed: St. Francis Preparatory School and P.S. 177.

However, according to both state and city health departments, all these confirmed cases in New York have been mild. All the patients have recovered or are recovering.

According to health department officials, we are still in flu season, and human swine flu is the predominant form of influenza, at present.

At this time, state and local health departments have advised us that children can continue to go to school and child care – as long as they are not sick and their families do not think they have flu symptoms.

Flu symptoms include: a fever over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, cough, sore throat, and a runny or stuff nose. Additional symptoms that may be experienced with swine flu include muscle pain, fatigue, and, sometimes, vomiting or diarrhea.

If a child in your care has flu symptoms, please contact the child's family immediately and ask that the child be removed from care.

If you have flu symptoms, stay home. Do not go to school, child care, or work and do not go anywhere where you could expose other people to flu germs, including mass transportation (buses and subways), the mall, or sporting events.

Knowing that we are still in flu season, it is important to exercise basic precautions to protect yourself and others from infection, and to teach these precautions to children for whom you are responsible at home or at work.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Twenty seconds is ideal – it's about as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.
- Despite any regulatory provisions to the contrary, you may use hand sanitizer. Gels, rubs, and hand wipes all work well as long as they contain at least 60 percent alcohol. Hand wipes must be disposed of properly. Always read and follow label instructions when using hand sanitizer.
- Keep your hands away from your face and avoid touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of your elbow. If you don't have a tissue handy, cough or sneeze into your sleeve and not your hands.

This information is available in 14 languages, including Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, and Creole, on the New York City Health Department website at www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/home/home.shtml. If you serve children and families with limited English proficiency, please print out and provide them with the appropriate language fact sheets.

If we all practice good hygiene, health officials believe we can limit the spread of the swine flu.

However, as a provider, be prepared for possible school and child care closings if the flu virus continues to spread.

To get the latest information on this flu outbreak, call the state's 24-hour toll-free telephone hotline at 800-808-1987 or visit the state health department website at www.nyhealth.gov or the Centers for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov/swineflu.

Sincerely,

Gladys Carrión, Esq.
 Commissioner
 NYS Office of Children and Family Services

Richard F. Daines, M.D.
 Commissioner
 NYS Department of Health

OCFS Fact Sheet for Child Care Providers: Swine Flu

Child care providers in community based child care programs in all settings including both center-based and family child care programs should:

- Review their plans for responding to a pandemic. Make sure that they are up to date and that parents know what they are.
- Remind parents and enforce policies for having ill children stay at home during their illness. In most areas, children with mild respiratory illnesses including allergies should be allowed to attend child care as long they are able to participate comfortably and their care does not result in a greater need for care than the staff can provide without compromising the health and safety of the other children (Caring for Our Children- Standard 3.065). Children with symptoms of an influenza-like illness should not come to school. Symptoms of swine influenza include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, and, in some cases diarrhea. The child's health care provider will determine whether influenza testing is needed and when the child can return to child care.
- Remind workers not to come to work while if they have an influenza like illness. They should consult their health care provider to determine whether influenza testing is needed.
- Health departments in areas affected by the swine flu outbreak may recommend more rigid exclusion policies so providers will need to stay informed on what is happening in their communities.
- Child with influenza may be infectious for up to 10 days after illness onset with influenza while adults are generally infectious for 5-7 days. If a child has been confirmed to have swine influenza, then seek the advice of the child's health provider and the health department about when the child can return to the child care program
- Be familiar with local/state plans for child care in the event of a mild or severe pandemic. This information may be available from state or local health authorities, child care licensing agencies or resource and referral agencies. If these plans do not include specific approaches to communicate with and handle situations in child care, do what you can to advocate for updating the plans.
- Develop and implement a system to track illness and absence due to illness among children and staff if one is not already in place. The system should be simple and easy to maintain but should record the number of persons with various illnesses (e.g. respiratory, diarrhea, rash) by day or at least by week. (see Caring for Our Children Standards 3.001 and 3.002 for information on how to do this (<http://nrckids.org/CFOC/PDFVersion/Chapter%203.pdf>- page 2)
- Review and implement CDC Guidelines and Recommendations for Preventing the Spread of Influenza (the Flu) in Child Care Settings: Guidance for Administrators, Care Providers, and Other Staff, (<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/childcaresettings.htm>)
- Make sure staff are familiar with the above guidelines and that they are being followed in your program. Remind child care staff to clean/disinfect frequently touched surfaces within the facility.
- Provide information to parents on steps that they could take to prevent flu. (See attached fact sheet that could be distributed to each parent or posted on a door to the facilities with providers calling attention to the posted fact sheet).
- Monitor the postings on the CDC web site about this virus (www.cdc.gov/swineflu) and information from state or local health departments to see if child care facilities should begin preparing for possible closure or changes in operation.
- Work with parents to consult the child's health provider if you have questions about a child with a respiratory illness or if you suspect a child might have influenza. Contact your child care health consultant or local public health department if you need help to make decisions promptly that affect the children as a group

Child care and preschool programs can help protect the health of their staff and the children and families they serve by calling attention to the every day preventive actions that parents can initiate to protect their children. (Please consider posting or distributing the attached message in your child care facility).

More information on preventing the spread of influenza can be found at: <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/school/preschool.html>. For generic information on disaster preparedness, see NACCRRRA's web site http://www.naccrra.org/for_parents/coping/disaster.php

Additional generic planning information for child care programs and schools, including examples of state and local plans, can be found on the Department of Education's website at: <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/pandemic/index.html>.

Note: Conditions and situations are rapidly changing and these recommendations may change over time.