

The federal government on April 26, 2009, declared a public health emergency after several cases of swine flu were confirmed in the United States. It is expected that more cases will be confirmed in the coming days. A number of US schools have been affected and are taking appropriate precautions to avoid the spread of the disease.

PTA, along with public agencies across the country, has been working over the past year to educate parents and schools about the potential spread of influenza through the Let's Fight Flu Together! initiative. Swine flu is a unique strain of influenza, and standard influenza precautions should be applied. PTA is not an expert in this area, but we would like to take this opportunity to share with you several resources from the CDC that may be helpful in communicating appropriate Swine Flu responses to your local PTAs.

PTA suggests that all schools and PTA units follow the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other appropriate agencies, in response to preventing the spread of flu germs. We will continue to monitor the situation and will keep you informed about developments to the best of our ability.

Influenza and its complications, in general, remain a critical public health issue. Many people think influenza, or "the flu," is just a bad cold. However, influenza can be a serious and potentially deadly virus.¹ On average each year, students miss approximately 38 million school days due to influenza and parents miss more than 10 million work days caring for these sick youngsters.^{2,3} Moreover, during the last influenza season in the US, 83 children were reported who died from influenza-related causes.⁴

With the occurrence of the Swine Flu strain, however, the chance for infection does increase. As a PTA, consider this as an opportunity to educate your parents, teachers, and community about common sense ways to prevent the spread of the virus in order to keep children in school, help parents stay at work, and help to save lives. Additionally, you may want to share information around the indications that a visit to the doctor is necessary as well as to share classroom precautions to take for children, teachers and parent volunteers. Please share any, or all of this letter and the attached resources as you see necessary. Additional resources are located on the PTA national website at <http://www.pta.org/2940.htm>.

"PTA was founded on taking action for the health and wellness of children, parents, school staff and community members." said Byron Garrett, Chief Executive Officer, National PTA. And, "people need to know that personal hygiene, such as washing your hands and good nutrition are only part of staying healthy during the influenza season," said Richard Kanowitz, President of Families Fighting Flu. For more information on the Let's Fight Flu Together! initiative, please visit www.pta.org/flushotclinics.

For additional information, tools and handouts please refer to the following US Center for Disease Control resources:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/> <<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/>>

http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/flugallery/2008-09/parents_guide.htm
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/flugallery/2008-09/parents_guide.htm>

http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/swineflu_you.htm
<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/swineflu_you.htm>

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention "Questions & Answers: Seasonal Influenza" available at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/disease.htm> <<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/disease.htm>> . Accessed, September 18, 2008.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Vital and Health Statistics. "Current Estimates From the National Health Interview Survey, 1996." October 1999.
3. Neuzil, K. M., Hohlbein, C. & Zhy, Y. Arch Pediatrics Adolescent Medicine. "Illness Among Schoolchildren During Influenza Season." Vol. 156, October 2002.
4. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, "Influenza Activity-United States and Worldwide, 2007-08 Season." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. June 27, 2008 / 57(25); 692-697.