



Milwaukee Public Schools

May 4, 2009
Edition 1

The MPS Family and Student Guide to school closures due to swine flu (H1N1)

Our students and their families have many questions about the City of Milwaukee's swine flu (H1N1) public health emergency. A number of schools have been closed.

The primary source of medical information is the City of Milwaukee Health Department. The Health Department hotline is (414) 286-3616. If you would like medical information online, see the Health Department Web site at <http://www.milwaukee.gov/health>

Here are some of the questions we have heard from our students and their families, along with our answers. For additional questions, please call the MPS Parent Center (414) 475-8847.

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Why did you close schools?

MPS did not close its schools. The decision to close some schools was made by the City of Milwaukee Health Commissioner, acting on the best information he had at the time about confirmed and suspected cases of the illness in the community, and his concerns for stemming the transmission of the virus.

Why aren't *all* the schools closed?

The Milwaukee Health Commissioner is the decision maker on which schools should close due to the swine flu outbreak. Health Commissioner Bevan Baker has made NO decision to close all schools – only those he believes have staff or students who have had contact with a confirmed or suspected case.

How soon will these schools open again?

The Milwaukee Health Department stated on May 3 that the 16 schools ordered closed by the commissioner would remain closed at least through Friday, May 8.

What should students and staff in closed schools be told to do?

Students should stay home. Staff should stay home if their primary job involved working directly with children or adults especially in group settings.

In the schools that remain open, will children be marked as *excused* if parents call in to report that their child will stay home today due to worries about swine flu?

Yes, these would be excused absences. We want to state, though, that schools that have not been closed by the health commissioner are open. We are eager to see your child in class, and not missing out on lessons.

Does my child need to wear a face mask at school?

Some parents may decide to have their child wear a mask while at school because the child may be immuno-compromised. We respect that. However, MPS does NOT recommend face masks for our general population, and neither does the Milwaukee Health Department.

My child goes to an MPS school that is not closed, but I am worried about whether it's being kept clean enough to stop the spread of swine flu.

MPS facilities are cleaned daily. Our routines include daily cleaning and disinfecting of restrooms and locker rooms. The Milwaukee Health Department has not recommended anything other than standard cleaning and sanitation routines.

Are schools being cleaned in preparation for staff and student return?

Schools that are ordered closed will be cleaned and *disinfected* prior to reopening. Our cleaning crews will use disinfectant on all surfaces students and staff commonly touch, such as desktops, doorknobs and telephone receivers. The Milwaukee Health Department has not recommended anything other than standard cleaning and sanitation routines, but the disinfection is in line with guidelines from the CDC. Be assured we are eager to get in to the buildings and prepare them for the return of students and staff.

What about students who volunteered at school sites that are now closed by the Health Commissioner, or who have been in those sites for other reasons?

If they worked directly with children or adults, especially in a group setting, they now need to stay home. They should monitor themselves or have their parents monitor them for flu-like symptoms. If they are sick they should contact a health care professional.

My child needs to have the school breakfast and lunch. We're not working right now and I'm worried about having enough food at home now that the school is closed.

Call 2-1-1, and ask the operator about food banks in your area. The Hunger Task Force is working with 2-1-1 during these school closures to help families to be linked with food resources or help for other types of emergencies.

Is it possible my child was on a school bus with a child who went to a school that is now closed by the Health Department?

Our yellow school bus routes are dedicated routes, meaning a bus picks up children for a certain school and then delivers them directly to that school.

One of my children goes to a school that was closed by the Health Department and another of my children goes to a school that is open. Should the child who is enrolled at the open school stay home, too?

Your other children may continue to go to their schools. However, they need to stay home if have any symptoms of flu or respiratory illness, or if they are told to stay home by the Health Department.

What about a student from one of the closed schools who shows up for an event at another school – or comes in to an open school to pick up his brother? Is that okay?

No. Children who attend schools that are closed by order of the Health Commissioner should stay home.

In class, my little girl sits next to a child who went to Mexico over spring break. Should I be worried about this?

A child's recent travel with his family, and for that matter, a child's ethnicity, should not lead anyone to isolate that child or be fearful of contact. Our staff will intervene if a child or a staff member is experiencing flu symptoms, and would advise that steps are taken to consult a health care professional and, if appropriate, for the sick child or staff member to stay home.

Will the students and staff in a closed school have to make up the missed days?

No. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction told us that "If a Local Health Officer or the State Health Officer orders schools to be closed, the days schools are closed under that health department order count toward the statutory 180 day requirement."

My child is missing a lot by not being in school. As these closures continue, what will you do about educating children who've had to stay home due to orders by the health commissioner?

As the closures continue, the district will be ready to provide access to education resources. We are looking at a variety of resources, including online tools.

Can you get swine flu from eating pork? We sometimes see pork on the MPS lunch menu.

No. Swine flu is not transmitted by food. Eating pork will not give you swine flu.

MPS assures you that our School Nutrition staff will continue to follow health guidelines for preparation and handling of all foods, including pork. We do not intend to change any of our menu items in the near future.

What happens to the classroom pets in the closed schools?

Cleaning staff are allowed in to the closed schools, and those staff members will do their best to provide care for any classroom pets.

My child goes to one of the closed schools. We want to get in there to get his backpack out of his locker. There's medicine in the backpack that he needs.

We're sorry, but the Health Department has ordered some schools closed to the public. Only a limited number of staff has access to the closed buildings. Please call the MPS Parent Center at (414) 475-8847. We will get a message to your principal and try to work something out for you.

What will happen to the National Advanced Placement (AP) exams scheduled from May 4 through May 15?

Currently the only high schools impacted by this concern are Riverside University High School and ALAS. AP exams and study sessions in closed schools will be scheduled in accordance with the school building reopening. Any AP exams missed due to the closing will be rescheduled between May 20 and 22. AP exams in MPS high schools that have not been closed will take place as planned between May 4 and May 15.

There's an event in two days at my son's school, which is not one of the schools that the Health Commissioner closed. Over 400 people will be there. Should I go?

Our school leaders are deciding about events as information from health experts evolves. Keep in touch with your school. The district's communications office will help get the word out on any cancellations. Local health officials have stated that there should be no fear about large gatherings. Watch the news, or go to the Milwaukee Health Department Web site at <http://www.milwaukee.gov/health> for the latest guidance on this.

How will we know when it is okay to come back to school?

When the Health Commissioner tells MPS we can reopen a school or schools, you will hear about it in the media. We will also have information on the MPS Portal, <http://mpsportal.milwaukee.k12.wi.us>, and you will get a recorded message from the district.

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MPS thanks you for your patience.

School closures due to order of a local health official are unusual. We know there is a lot of inconvenience, and perhaps some worry. MPS thanks everyone for their patience and eagerness to help during this public health emergency.

Believe it!
Achieve it!

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