

# Wilton Public Schools H1N1 Flu Update - August 17, 2009

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Dear Parent/Guardian,

As part of our preparations for the upcoming school year this letter is being sent to you to communicate how we intend to respond in the event of a return of the H1N1 Flu this fall as predicted by most experts in the field. In this letter you will find the following information:

- How and when we will communicate with you
- What you should do if your child displays flu-like symptoms
- What we can all do to mitigate the effects of a flu outbreak
- How a decision to close school(s) will be made
- What we will do if we have to close school(s)

## **How and when we will communicate with you:**

The most up-to-date information will *always* be posted on the Wilton Public Schools website [www.wilton.k12.ct.us](http://www.wilton.k12.ct.us). We will use our mass phone call system (AlertNow) to contact you only in the following instances:

- The first confirmed case of H1N1 Flu in any of our schools (we will *not* call each time a new case is confirmed after that)
- A significant change in our situation, such as the need to close school(s)
- A significant change in Centers for Disease Control (CDC) or Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) protocols

**All other information regarding H1N1 Flu will be posted on our website, so please check it frequently for updates.** Last spring the school offices and the Superintendent's office received many phone calls requesting information that was available on our website, so we ask you to please check the website before contacting us by phone or email.

## **What you should do if your child displays flu-like symptoms:**

The exclusion criterion recommended by the CDC and DPH as of the date of this letter states that if your child displays flu-like symptoms (a fever of 100°F *and* a cough *or* a sore throat) they should be kept home until they are symptom-free for 24 hours. The criterion is subject to change, so please check our website [www.wilton.k12.ct.us](http://www.wilton.k12.ct.us) for up-to-date information. When you contact your child's school to report the absence, it would be helpful if you report that he or she is displaying "flu-like" symptoms. Consult with your child's pediatrician regarding treatment.

According to the CDC and DPH, the most effective way to slow or prevent the spread of the flu is "social distancing". This means that when your child has presented flu-like symptoms and is out of school you should make every effort to avoid having him or her in contact with other children. We realize that this could be an inconvenience, but it is very important if we are to restrict the spread of H1N1 Flu. We had a number of instances in the spring where sick children were sent to school because they had an important exam or a field trip and this resulted in the flu being spread to other students, prolonging our outbreak. If your child is kept home, please check with his or her teacher(s) for assignments or to make up tests.

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### **What we can all do to mitigate the effects of a flu outbreak:**

According to the CDC and DPH, proper hand washing or sanitizing, and social distancing are two of the most effective ways to restrict the spread of influenza. These steps should be reinforced at school and at home. We will remain in active contact with the Town Department of Health and the Town's Flu Response Team.

If you or your child has a compromised immune system or other condition that would classify you as "high risk", you should consult with your physician to see if you or your child should take additional precautionary measures.

At this time The Federal Government is planning to provide H1N1 vaccine for school-aged children. We do not know how this will be distributed at this time, but we are currently working with the town Flu Response Team to plan for this possibility. You will be notified promptly when the plan is finalized. Information about the availability of H1N1 vaccine will be posted on the Town of Wilton Flu Response Team website [www.wilton.ct.org](http://www.wilton.ct.org).

### **How a decision to close school(s) will be made:**

The research on the effect of school closing on the spread of the flu is inconclusive and we will likely not close school unless the level of student/faculty absenteeism interferes with our ability to function. In this event, the decision to close school(s) will be made by the Superintendent in consultation with the Town Department of Health and the Town Flu Response Team. This decision will be made according to CDC and DPH guidelines in effect at the time.

When this decision is made, the information will be posted on our website and we will notify parents by phone using the AlertNow system. The AlertNow system is not foolproof, which is another reason to check our website if you have any questions.

### **What we will do if we have to close school(s):**

Teachers will have prepared up to two weeks' worth of assignments that your child can do at home. There may be some additional online learning opportunities.

If the State Department of Education does not give us a waiver on the 180 day school year requirement, we will be forced to make up the days by shortening the December holiday break or the spring breaks, and/or extending the school year beyond the scheduled end of classes. The decision to shorten vacations or extend the school year will be made based on several factors including the length of closure. We hope that we are not put in the position to make such a decision, but we want to make sure that you are aware that closure is a possibility.

Although there are many uncertainties associated with the H1N1 Flu, the Wilton Public Schools will continue to work closely with the Town's Flu Response Team and follow the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and the State Department of Public Health. We thank you for your patience, understanding, and cooperation.