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Dear Parent or Guardian:

As H1N1 (swine) flu becomes more common in New York City, many schools are reporting high absenteeism rates and more students with flu-like illness.

H1N1 is a lot like regular (seasonal) flu. Most people who get it have only a mild illness, and most get better on their own without medicine. But some people are more likely to get seriously ill if they come down with the flu. Those at high risk of complications include children under 2, adults over 65, pregnant women, and people with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes or asthma. Flu also poses special dangers for people with heart, liver, kidney or blood disorders, and for people with neurological problems that can interfere with breathing.

If we see evidence that flu is spreading rapidly in a school, we may temporarily close it to reduce the risk to vulnerable people. If a school's medical office reports an increase in the number of students developing fever with cough or sore throat, the Health Department monitors the school closely from day to day to see if the problem continues. We pay special attention to a school if the number of children sent home with fevers on a given day reaches 1% to 2% of the student body. In deciding whether to close a school, we also weigh special circumstances, such as the presence of children with special needs.

You and your family can help reduce the spread of flu in our schools by following some simple guidelines.

- Watch your child closely for signs of flu-like illness. Any child with fever and a cough or sore throat should stay home until he or she has been completely well for 24 hours.
- Remember to cover coughs and sneezes and wash hands frequently with soap and water.
- If a child with asthma or another chronic condition develops flu-like illness, call your doctor right away to discuss the need for medication.
- Unless your child is severely ill, please do *not* seek care at a hospital. There is no need to go to an emergency department, and no benefit for the child.

The attached fact sheet has important information for parents. It explains how you can protect against the flu, what to do if your child has flu-like symptoms, when to call a doctor, when to take your child to the hospital, and how the City decides whether to close a school. It also offers tips and resources for coping with the stress of caused by this situation. For more information, you can always visit www.nyc.gov/health or <http://schools.nyc.gov/>.

Sincerely Yours,