



MESSAGE TO PARENTS FROM THE CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER

Re: Student exclusions from school due to Human Swine Influenza - 24 May 2009

Dear parents,

I have advised school principals that, for the time being, any student who returns home from travel to Mexico, USA, Canada, Japan or Panama should be excluded from school for seven days after arrival in Australia.

I have done this on the advice of the Australian Health Protection Committee, the body responsible for management of health issues of national importance which is dealing with our response to H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Flu). This is a new strain of flu that has recently been confirmed in over 40 countries around the world. So far there have been over 11,000 cases (including multiple cases on mainland Australia) and 85 deaths.

This flu virus is a concern because:

- It is new, so there is no vaccine.
- It seems to spread more easily than normal, seasonal flu.
- While many people who get sick with this virus have a mild illness, some people get very sick and need hospital care and some have died.
- It is affecting mostly young people under the age of 30, which is unusual for flu.

Considerable effort is going into delaying arrival of this virus into the ACT, and making sure that, if the virus does arrive here, it is not given the chance to spread. This is important while we wait for a vaccine to become available. This will be some months.

At this stage (and this is likely to change over coming weeks) there are five countries where the virus is spreading within the community to an extent that warrants extra precautions. These countries are **Mexico, USA, Canada, Japan and Panama.**

There are no grounds for recommending against travel to these countries and neither the World Health Organisation nor the Australian Government have done so. However there are grounds for extra precautions to help stop the virus spreading from returned travellers.

This is why I have instructed schools that, for the time being, **any student who travels to Mexico, USA, Canada, Japan or Panama should be excluded from school for seven days after arrival in Australia.** During these seven days, the student should stay home **whether or not they have flu symptoms.** This is because a person infected with flu can spread the virus a whole day before they start to feel unwell.

During the seven days that a student is excluded from school, they should not attend after-school activities, community events, sporting events or training, public entertainment facilities, or go to shopping malls/centres. Students should remain at home as much as possible, and away from other people.

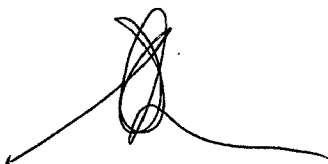
I realise this will be difficult for some families, especially where parents are working. However this strategy is important and will help protect the whole community. At this stage the exclusion does not affect children at child care. This decision is based on information available so far about how this virus spreads.

For more information about these arrangements, please contact your school. For more information about H1N1 Influenza 09 go to www.health.act.gov.au or phone the national information line, 180 2007.

If you are feeling unwell or you have flu like symptoms and have been to any of the affected countries (Mexico, USA, Canada, Japan and Panama) in the last seven days, or you have had contact with someone suspected of having H1N1 influenza 09, please phone Health Direct on 1800 022 222.

Thank you for your assistance in this important community health issue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Eddie O'Brien', with a long horizontal line extending to the left.

Dr Eddie O'Brien
Acting Chief Health Officer

24 May 2009