



County of Erie

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Erie County Department of Health
Approach to School Dismissal and Childcare Facility Closure
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- Protection of our children is the collective responsibility of public health, schools/daycare facilities, and parents (i.e., the “protectors”). Each protector has independent yet overlapping and equally important responsibility and authority to insure that our children remain safe. Public health protects children as a group, schools/daycares protect children as a group and individually, and parents protect children individually (i.e., their own children).
- Each protector can and should independently determine from each of their unique perspectives whether a child or children should or should not attend school/daycare based upon the best science and information available.
- From a public health perspective, the reason to close a school/daycare is to minimize the spread of an infectious disease in the school/daycare, as well as in the surrounding community.
 - Consideration of school/daycare closure must balance the benefits from closing a school/daycare against the risks of not closing the school/daycare. The downsides to closing a school/daycare are significant and must also be carefully considered since above all, we should “first, do no harm.” The closure of a school/daycare would have significant impact on the school, students, parents, and the community at large, and should not outweigh the benefits.
 - In order to maximize effectiveness, the school/daycare should close for up to 14 days in consultation with public health. Furthermore, this must include the cancellation of all after-school activities including proms, graduations, sporting events, and all other school sponsored mass gathering events.
 - In addition, children must stay home and not congregate in other non-school settings (e.g., shopping malls, movie theaters, friends’ homes) for that entire period. Children should not be placed in daycare.
 - It is important to note that individual schools/daycares are only part of a complex community in which students, faculty, and staff interact. In other words, the swine flu virus is not confined within the walls of the school/daycare. Students, faculty, and staff interact with others in many settings beyond the school/daycare environment. Thereby, it is unlikely that closure of a single school/daycare will have maximum effectiveness without other social distancing actions in the

community (e.g., suspension of community sports leagues, dance lessons, religious gatherings) or closure of other schools/daycares. Therefore, the decision to close an individual school/daycare must be made in conjunction with other actions taken in the community. The decision to reopen the school/daycare after the closure period should be based upon the level of swine flu activity in the community.

- Opening a school/daycare when significant swine flu activity still exists in the community may lead to reintroduction of the infection into the school/daycare, and a need to repeat the closure cycle.
- The swine flu situation is evolving rapidly; and, therefore, our approach must be fluid. However, the current Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) approach and rationale is as follows:
 - The current behavior of swine flu in the United States is actually less lethal than a typical human influenza season during which up to 36,000 people including some children die. Again, this could change at any time and is being closely monitored by ECDOH. However, historically public health does not suggest that schools/daycares close during human influenza season.
 - In collaboration with county health departments and based upon CDC guidance, the New York State Department of Health updated its pandemic influenza plan in 2008. The plan was developed from an evidence-based approach and called for school/daycare closure based upon case fatality rate (i.e., percentage of deaths), and not upon the number of infected individuals, location of infected individuals, or any other parameters. More specifically, this current plan does not call for “recommending” or even “considering” school closure until the case fatality rate has exceeded 0.1%, which is more than a typical human flu season. Although subject to change at any time especially since the current outbreak is still evolving, no one who has contracted swine flu in the United States has died. Following this pre-existing State plan would suggest that school/daycare closure should not be based upon the documentation of a single case as the CDC has recently suggested.
 - The ECDOH requests that schools/daycares implement strict respiratory hygiene practices, establish an aggressive cleaning and disinfection program, and immediately exclude any ill students, faculty, or staff. Further, any possible cases should be reported immediately to the ECDOH.
 - In addition, the ECDOH requests that school/daycare officials discuss any further actions on a case by case basis and not automatically close based upon a single case. We will continue to very closely follow national, state, and local data including the case fatality rate, and revise this approach as necessary and appropriate.
- The ECDOH fully acknowledges that schools/daycares, as another protector of our children, maintain independent and overlapping authority to close schools/daycares regardless of ECDOH actions or recommendations. In addition, schools may decide to close for reasons other than public health (e.g., inadequate teacher attendance).
- Finally and very importantly, parents as the ultimate protectors of their children may decide to limit their children from the school environment even if the school remains open.