

## Remarks by Secretary Napolitano at Today's Media Briefing on the H1N1 Flu Outbreak



Release Date: May 5, 2009

For Immediate Release  
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Washington, D.C.

**Secretary Napolitano:** And again, thank you for joining us. Today the CDC reports that we have 403 confirmed cases in 38 states. As I said yesterday, we remain cautiously optimistic about how this virus is spreading and the fact that it appears relatively mild when we think about the potential for novel influenza strains.

As a result, the CDC [Centers for Disease Control] today modified its interim guidance regarding the closure of schools and child care facilities. As CDC announced earlier today, this particular strain is currently causing a disease similar in nature to seasonal influenza, and with the new information they've been able to collect, no longer recommend communities immediately close schools. Instead, teachers and students with influenza-like illness should stay home, which is consistent with what would be recommended during a typical flu season.

This is an encouraging development, and we applaud communities and school districts for taking proper actions to protect the heart and well-being of students and faculty while the scientific process was ongoing. And although we have these encouraging signs, I want to be clear. This is not a time for complacency or the belief that we can simply declare victory over H1N1 and move on. While we have taken steps that have successfully limited the impact of H1N1 at this time, this virus is still present in our country. People are still getting infected and sick, with some requiring hospitalization. And H1N1 will likely reemerge down the road, even as early as the coming fall when the flu season really begins.

This is why we are preparing now for what may come in the future. We are not in a place where we can simply sit back and see what happens. We have to lean forward. And we have to remain prepared because nature has a way of being little unpredictable and throwing a curve ball from time to time.

We are operating not only on a theory of leaning forward, but one of shared responsibility. Again, individuals need to continue to practice good, common-sense hygiene to prevent the spread of the flu. This means washing your hands regularly, covering your mouth when you cough, cough into your sleeve, and if you are sick, stay home from work; if your child is sick, keep your child home from school. These are the ways—the basic precautions that can be used to prevent the spread of the illness.

Families—families need to have contingency plans for dealing with school closures and other items that might impact the household. As I mentioned earlier today, CDC's interim guidance has now changed as they've learned more about this flu so that they are no longer recommending school closure.

Businesses—businesses should have contingency plans to deal with absent and sick employees so that your operations can continue. Managers need to be thinking about the next phase of this outbreak to ensure the continuity of operations and services.

And governments at all levels, federal, state, local, tribal—they need to stay focused and continue to work together as we have for the past two weeks. I've been pleased with that cooperation so far. We're going to keep it up.

Everyone has a role to play in this effort, and today I'm pleased to announce that progress has been made and the CDC now has been able to revise the guidance for our schools.

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This page was last reviewed/modified on May 5, 2009.