



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Shepard Building
255 Westminster Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

Peter McWalters
Commissioner

May 6, 2009

To: Superintendents
From: Peter McWalters, Commissioner
Re: CRITICAL DAILY ABSENTEE REPORTING

As you know, the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) has been working closely with the Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH) to address the spread of the H1N1 (Swine Flu) virus in Rhode Island. Please know I appreciate your professionalism, understanding, and cooperation during this incident.

Yesterday the CDC made an important adjustment to its school-related policies:

At this time, CDC recommends the primary means to reduce spread of influenza in schools is to focus on early identification of ill students and staff, staying home when ill and good cough and hand hygiene etiquette. Decisions about school closure should be at the discretion of the school district in coordination with the RI Department of Health based on local considerations and the impact of school absenteeism and staffing shortages.

Therefore, at this time HEALTH will not necessarily look to close schools upon the finding of a suspect, probable, or actual case of H1N1 virus. Instead HEALTH will look to overall absenteeism as the determining factor regarding school closings. Absentee rates in schools are often the first indication that an outbreak could be occurring.

This makes daily attendance reporting even more critical. We need to do all that we can to ensure that schools monitor and report absenteeism in real time on a daily basis.

Ed Giroux, in the RIDE office of Network and Information Systems, is working with your IT offices to make sure that you have your automated absenteeism system up and running, or, in the interim, that you are forwarding same-day electronic attendance reports to RIDE. We would appreciate it if you could contact your IT personnel and ask them to be proactive and to contact Ed Giroux, at ed.giroux@ride.ri.gov, or at 222-8968, for further instructions. Please make it a priority to have these reports completed and to us by 1:00 p.m. each day.

Lastly, until further notice, school nurses and student health centers should report higher than normal absenteeism to HEALTH at 401-222-2577.

Thank you again for your understanding and cooperation.