

## **Use the PTA Network Share Information on Swine Flu (H1N1)**

### **PTA and the Swine Flu (H1N1):**

The federal government on April 26, 2009, declared a public health emergency after several cases of swine flu were confirmed in the United States. It is expected that more cases will be confirmed in the coming days. A number of US schools have been affected and are taking appropriate precautions to avoid the spread of the disease.

PTA suggests that all schools and PTA units follow the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other appropriate agencies, in response to preventing the spread of flu germs. Also, utilize the support system and network that PTA naturally provides for your school to ensure effective and efficient communication among parents and families.

### **Using the PTA Support System:**

**Let members know how they can participate** by clearly sharing resources from health departments, PTA, CDC, and other local, state, and national sources. Identify specific issues or concerns in which PTA could be involved at your school. Make issues and communication goals real to members so they can participate and assist at school, work with other parents, and/or help the children at the school, or in the community at large.

**Use your local PTA website** to bring attention to current issues and PTA efforts at your school, the surrounding district and, even, surrounding communities. Post news bulletins on your home page, devote part of your PTA newsletter or e-mail communications to Swine Flu (H1N1), and add links to the school and district web sites. Add the widget from the CDC, which links to the most current information about the Swine Flu (H1N1):

<http://www.hhs.gov/web/library/index.html#HHSWidgets>.

**Build a communication network** to disseminate important information quickly and efficiently. Send email alerts when new information becomes available and phone parents to quickly disseminate information to your PTA membership. Keeping parents informed with current and accurate information is key.

**Create and participate in bulletin boards** on your PTA website to share information with PTA members and parents. Post resources that will offer parents accurate information, answers to their questions, and education materials for their family. Offer your school principal the opportunity to contribute and/or host an “online chat” with your members to clear up concerns and misinformation.

**Reach Out Beyond the PTA Circle** as a PTA unit. Be a resource to community decision makers. Be at the table for discussions involving school policy and action plans for addressing the Swine Flu (H1N1). Talk to your school principal and district administrators. Go to the school board meetings to ensure PTA has a voice.

**Partner with your school nurse** to ensure the correct information is shared with your parents. School nurses have a good perspective on the spread of germs within the school environment. They can answer many questions parents may have about the Swine Flu's (H1N1) symptoms and prevention and are a credible resource in your school community.

**Encourage current active members to contact friends, neighbors, and colleagues** to tell them about PTA network efforts. Approach people from other organizations with similar concerns and interests and attend school-related and community events where a PTA presence would be welcome to share information and concerns.

**PTA Task List to Educate PTA Members about the Swine Flu (H1N1):**

- Prepare to explain the PTA resources on Swine Flu. Help parents talk to their children about what is happening.
- Listen to people's concerns and show how PTA is helping to address effectively. Every parent will have individual questions and challenges.
  - *Gather e-mail address, phone numbers, and other contact information so any non-PTA contacts can be added to your communication network. Assign a PTA member to utilize the network to make reminder calls or send e-mails to reinforce your commitment to help disseminate timely information to your parents.*
- Build on PTA's national resources by adding local school and district information and include these resources in your communication.
- Set up a bulletin board, listserv, or email lists to allow list members to exchange information. Encourage all communication to be timely, accurate, and effective.
- Give as much advance notice as possible about informational, organizational, and action meetings.
- Set up small working groups of three to five parents who can focus their attention on a specific, narrow issue or a specific aspect of a larger issue.

**Resources:**

- The National Parent Teacher Association: [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/key\\_facts.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/key_facts.htm)
- US Department of Health and Human Services: <http://www.hhs.gov/>
- US Department of Education: <http://www.ed.gov>
- Swine Flu (H1N1) Widget for Your Web Site: <http://www.hhs.gov/web/library/index.html#HHSWidgets>

## **PTA School Educational Activity Ideas:**

- Create a panel of experts to speak at a town hall meeting or your next event. Invite representatives from your school administration, local health department, and your school nurse to share information with all parents.
  - *Clearly lay out the district plans.*
  - *Share prevention tips.*
  - *Offer PTA informational handouts to attendees.*
  - *Point parents to the online resources such as the Bulletin Board discussion and your web site Q & A section.*
  
- Create a “I washed my hands” campaign in the school.
  - *Kids get stickers or points for every time they wash their hands during the school day.*
  
- Consider a “Safe Cough and Sneeze” program.
  - *Put anti-viral tissues in each classroom.*
  - *Have parents volunteer to go into classes to demonstrate safe coughing and sneezing.*
  - *Encourage kids to cover your mouth correctly.*
  
- Run a poster contest where kids create posters that demonstrate the importance of prevention.
  
- Encourage the school to make announcements on the PA system about washing hands, staying healthy, and getting plenty of rest.
  
- Plan now for your fall flu vaccination clinic with the *Let’s Fight Flu Together!* initiative. Go to [www.pta.org/flushotclinics](http://www.pta.org/flushotclinics) to register for your fall clinic.
  
- Present the “Spread the Word, Not the Flu” classroom activities in grades 3-8. Materials are available at [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)
  
- Work with your school nurse to effectively share information with all parents and students.

- Many local health departments and American Red Cross offices offer hand washing demonstrations. Invite your community partners to the school and share their information