

Message to all state employees from Wisconsin Dept. of Administration (DOA) Secretary Michael Morgan

May 8, 2009

As we are all aware, Wisconsin continues to face a public health emergency because of the Novel Influenza A (H1N1) 2009 outbreak. On the basis of limited experience to date, this strain causes symptoms similar to typical seasonal influenza strains, but in the absence of a vaccine, the risk of more rapid and wider disease spread, and of symptoms requiring health care will likely be greater.

This week the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued revised guidance for closing schools based on the relatively benign symptoms noted to date. Instead of closing schools that have experienced contact with a confirmed case of the Novel Influenza A (H1N1) 2009, the recommendation is to keep all students, faculty and staff with symptoms of Novel Influenza A (H1N1) 2009 excluded from schools and childcare facilities for at least a week after the onset of symptoms and at least 24 hours after symptoms have ended (whichever is longer). This policy is now more similar to that used for other communicable diseases.

Decisions on school closings or re-openings remain with local health departments and the local school districts, but the revised CDC policy should lessen the possibility that additional schools will need to shut down and will enable schools currently closed to reopen more quickly. The hope is that this will result in less strain on our families as we try to balance the need for childcare with continuing to serve the people of the State of Wisconsin.

Another sign of progress is that we now have three laboratories that are certified to conduct tests for the presence of the virus. This will reduce the backlog of testing and make test results available more quickly. It is important to note that due to the expanded lab capacity, an increase in cases of the Novel Influenza A (H1N1) 2009 will most likely be seen over the next several days.

The Department of Health Service's Division of Public Health will continue to monitor the evolution of this outbreak and its impact on communities. Personnel from over ten state agencies have participated in the response to date, and the level of collaboration has been extremely high and is deeply appreciated.

Even if influenza rates fall over the summer months, there will likely be special precautions and actions taken in anticipation of the return of this new influenza strain in the fall (for example, a new vaccine may need to be distributed).

We are committed to keeping you informed. Please consult the Wisconsin Pandemic Flu Resource (<http://pandemic.wisconsin.gov>) and the OSER Frequently Asked Questions (<http://oser.state.wi.us/category.asp?linkcatid=665&linkid=29>) often to remain up to date with this fast-moving situation. Contact your Human Resources Office if you have questions related to personnel management.

Michael L. Morgan
Secretary of Administration