



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
250 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02108-4619

DEVAL L. PATRICK
GOVERNOR

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

JUDYANN BIGBY, MD
SECRETARY

JOHN AUERBACH
COMMISSIONER

Dear Colleague:

We at DPH wanted to outline our public information protocol for announcing confirmed cases of H1N1 flu (swine flu). Before the cases are announced publicly, the local health agent will be notified. Notification before public announcement is almost always the most difficult step because the CDC officials sometimes give us a very short timeline between when they notify us and when they update cases on their web site. We will do our level best to make sure local notification happens prior to the public announcement.

There have been many media reports on "suspect" cases, however DPH has attempted to adhere to detailed below.

DPH STATEMENT ON CASE ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Consistent with CDC guidelines, it is the policy of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to comment only on confirmed cases of H1N1 flu (swine influenza). There are several important reasons for not commenting on specific "suspect cases". First, many of these cases will rule out for swine influenza, and commenting on them raises undue concern for families and communities. During a time of enhanced alertness for cases, DPH and local public health authorities will get many reports from health care providers about cases of flu-like illness. We will always follow up on reports consistent with CDC guidance and good public health practice; just because we are not commenting on unconfirmed cases, doesn't mean we're not working on those cases. Second, there have been a number of media reports on suspect cases that have included information that could be used to identify a specific person's health information, which in turn could violate that person's health privacy. Third, our goal throughout this outbreak is to provide the public with the most accurate and useful information.

On a related note, our State Lab will soon begin doing confirmatory testing for H1N1, so the time lag that we now experience with sending samples to CDC will no longer be an issue.

We recognize that local communities may also want to hold their own media availability. To that end, I have attached the DPH press release on the first confirmed cases in Massachusetts, which were announced earlier this week. I have also attached draft talking points that you may find helpful in announcing a confirmed case in your city or town. Obviously, these materials will have to be edited to reflect the specifics of your community's situation, but it is our hope that these help you with basic messaging.

We are updating the resources on our web site on a regular basis, so please make it part of your regular monitoring to check our web site: www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu.

Thanks, and I hope this is helpful.

Sincerely,
Tom Lyons