

# Schoolkids get 'flu days' even as CDC reconsiders

May 4 2009, By MARCUS FRANKLIN , Associated Press Writer

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Eight-year old Kaydn Hainline, of Marshalltown, Iowa, kicks a ball in front of his grandfather's house, on a day off from school Monday, May 4, 2009, in Marshalltown, Iowa. Marshalltown officials have closed schools for the week due to several probable cases of swine flu in the city. (AP Photo/Charlie Neibergall)

(AP) -- Federal health officials said Monday they were rethinking their advice that schools consider closing for as long as two weeks because of swine flu, a recommendation that has already given an unscheduled vacation to 330,000 children in schools nationwide.

Shutting down schools is intended to keep infections from spreading between students and then out into the community, said Dr. Richard Besser, acting chief of the federal [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). But in the cases of [swine flu](#) in schools, the virus was

apparently already circulating in the community, he said.

"We are looking at our school closure guidance," Besser said during a briefing for reporters in Atlanta. "And we're having very active discussions about whether it's time to revise that."

One option would be to "really push hard on the personal responsibility," Besser said, encouraging parents and teachers to look out for sick kids and insist they stay home if they're sick.

Besser cited the example of Seattle, where health officials have decided they won't routinely recommend that schools close if there's a suspected case of swine flu. Instead, they want students with flu-like symptoms to stay home for seven days.

Even the New York City school that was the epicenter of the nation's outbreak reopened Monday after a mere weeklong shutdown. Students at St. Francis Preparatory School, a private Roman Catholic high school in Queens, returned to classes with advice to use hand sanitizer and wash their hands more frequently.

As many as 1,000 people connected with the school fell ill with [flu symptoms](#) after a group of students returned from a spring break trip to [Mexico](#). The school had the largest swine [flu outbreak](#) in the country, with 45 confirmed cases.

"It's a little nerve-racking, being back in school, knowing that there was a swine flu outbreak in school," said junior Paulina Janowiec, 17. "But it's good to be back."

Last week, the CDC said it might be prudent to close a school for as long as 14 days if there were suspected cases, noting that children are contagious longer than adults do and have more social contacts. But

officials also stressed they would defer to the expertise of local authorities.

New York City health officials said they consulted frequently with school administrators to determine when St. Francis should reopen after hundreds of students fell ill at school April 23-24.

"Students and faculty were away from school for nine days, which is well beyond the incubation period for influenza," said Dr. Scott Harper, an epidemiologist with the city's Health Department.

An estimated 533 schools enrolling about 330,000 children had closed across the country as of Monday, the U.S. Education Department said. The schools are in two dozen states including New York, which at 90 has more confirmed cases than any other, officials said.

"We're planning it day by day right now," said Brit Brown, whose 8-year-old son, Truman, has been home since his Milwaukee school closed last Thursday.

Brown and his wife each took a day off work last week. On Monday, they sent their second-grader to his grandparents' home and on Tuesday planned to drop him off at the home of a friend whose school also had closed.

In Arizona, all 10 public schools in the border city of Nogales canceled classes this week after a student tested positive for swine flu. Deer Park, N.Y., closed seven schools enrolling more than 4,400 kids.

In Massachusetts, the Academy of Notre Dame in Tyngsborough, about 35 miles northwest of Boston, canceled classes and extracurricular activities for the entire week because one student has a probable case.

In New York, 204 of St. Francis' 2,700 students were out sick Monday. Brother Leonard Conway, the school principal, said that students "have a lot of work to do" to make up the lost classroom time and that final exams will start five days later than usual, on June 16.

"I'm just delighted and thank God that we're getting back to normal," he said.

The [school](#) flushed the air conditioning system and gave the building a complete scrubdown, among other safety precautions.

"I'm feeling great now," said returning 16-year-old Ivy Buchelli, who had suffered fever, chills and body aches. "After the long break, I'm glad to see everyone else and how they're doing."

"I'm just hoping the school's clean," she added.

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Associated Press writers Deepti Hajela and Frank Eltmann contributed to this report.

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