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CDC: Schools can reopen despite flu

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The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, after weeks of hysterical coverage on the swine flu, on Tuesday encouraged schools and businesses to reopen after deciding that the virus isn't as dangerous as once thought.



After reassurance from the Centers for Disease Control, four Maryland schools that closed during the swine flu scare are reopening.

Back to school

Schools reopening in the area:

- » Rockville High School
- » Vansville Elementary (Beltsville)
- » University Park Elementary (Hyattsville)
- » Montpelier Elementary (Laurel)

Still closed:

- » Our Lady of Victory (D.C.)

About 500 schools had been shuttered around the country, four of them in Washington's Maryland suburbs and one in the District.

“The overall conclusion, having studied very carefully what’s going on, is keep the affected students home, please, for a seven-day period of time ... but that the school should feel comfortable about reopening,” Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said Tuesday.

The Maryland schools announced they would reopen today, while Our Lady of Victory, a Catholic school in the District, will stay closed for at least seven days, said Susan Gibbs, spokeswoman for the Archdiocese of Washington.

“The D.C. Department of Health urged us to stay closed,” Gibbs said.

Despite official worries — and breathless, round-the-clock media warnings — that the swine flu pandemic would ravage world health, the strain turned out to be fairly benign.

But not totally benign: Health officials in Texas announced Tuesday that a U.S. resident had died from the virus. Twenty-eight people have died so far, most of them in Mexico.

About 36,000 U.S. residents die each year from flu, according to the CDC.

Despite the deaths, Cato Institute trade expert Daniel Griswold said he thought “that governments overreacted to the swine flu outbreak.”

“Yes, we should take all reasonable precautions. But calls for sealing the U.S.-Mexico border, steps by other governments to ban pork pigs, they all look over the top and ridiculous,” he said.

U.S. Rep. Jim Moran, D-Va., disagreed, saying that he thought the government’s reaction was “almost perfect.”

“I go by the theory better safe than sorry,” Moran said. “I don’t think that anybody was particularly inconvenienced.”

Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine and Maryland Gov. Martin O’Malley were among the earliest to declare swine flu a public health emergency. Four Maryland residents and three Virginia residents have been confirmed as having swine flu.

Montgomery County Councilman Roger Berliner, D-Potomac/Bethesda, a member of the council’s health committee, said the decision to close Rockville on Friday was “prudent at the time.”

“Everyone was operating in good faith based on the information provided,” he said.

Kaine’s spokesman, Gordon Hickey, said the governor had made the right call.

“We acted in the best interests of the public. Everything was done that was supposed to be done,” he said.

Teddy Kahn contributed to this article.

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