



H1N1 Influenza (Swine Flu)

As with avian influenza or any other influenza pandemic, the potential impact of H1N1 influenza on schools could be enormous, affecting student and staff health, school attendance and job performance. In addition, school-age children play a pivotal role in transmission of influenza to their households and communities. Schools are leading indicators of outbreak and must be prepared to prevent and respond to emergencies.

Careful planning, with a focus on prevention, is essential to reducing the threat of H1N1 influenza. Districts and county offices must also be prepared for the possibility that it may be necessary to close schools in the event that students, staff members or members of their household are diagnosed with H1N1 influenza. The local public health department will be key in assisting the district or county office in making such decisions.

Although relatively few cases of H1N1 influenza have been reported in the United States as of this writing, a public health emergency was declared by the Department of Homeland Security, which will allow funds to be released to support the public health response.

NOTE: Districts or county offices should report any suspected or known cases of H1N1 influenza to their local public health department and continue to maintain close contact. If the district or county office has a school closure due to confirmed or possible H1N1 influenza, e-mail the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at this e-mail address: flu@ed.gov.

What is H1N1 influenza?

This contagious virus is a subtype of the naturally occurring influenza, a virus that causes respiratory infections in pigs. Recently, the World Health Organization confirmed that at least some of the human cases of H1N1 influenza are a variation of the H1N1 strain of influenza

type A that has never been seen before. While H1N1 is the same strain that regularly causes seasonal outbreaks of flu, this latest version is different in that it contains genetic material typically found in strains of the virus affecting humans, birds and swine.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms are similar to seasonal influenza and include a fever over 100 degrees, cough, sore throat, body aches, lethargy and lack of appetite. Some people with H1N1 influenza have also reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

How is it contracted?

Transmission of H1N1 influenza is thought to happen in the same way as seasonal flu—that is, through coughing or sneezing by people infected with the virus. Infection may also be transmitted by touching something with the flu virus on it, such as doorknobs, bathroom handles, or desks that have been sneezed on, and then touching the mouth or nose.

How is it treated?

Although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that the best means of prevention is a flu shot, this particular strain is a unique combination of pig, bird and human flu for which there currently is no flu vaccine. As laboratory testing has determined that the H1N1 influenza will respond to prescription antiviral drugs, the CDC is releasing part of its stockpile to help states respond to the outbreak as needed.

As there is not yet a vaccine targeted to this strain, it is especially important to focus on prevention of disease and minimizing spread. According to the CDC, a combination of the following steps decreases the likelihood of transmitting infection:

- **Frequent handwashing.** Make sure bathrooms are well stocked with soap and paper towels throughout the

school day. School staff should encourage students to wash their hands often with soap and water. Alcohol-based hand cleansers should be placed in classrooms and offices whenever possible. See the CDC's "Handwashing" video at www.cdc.gov/Features/HandWashing, *Education World* article on handwashing with resources at www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin/admin431.shtml, and CDC's SNAP handwashing at www.itsasnap.org/index.asp.

- **Covering coughs and sneezes.** Students should be taught proper hygiene, including covering their nose and mouth with a tissue when they cough or sneeze and disposing of the tissue after they use it. Tissues should be provided in all classrooms. See the CDC's "Cover Your Cough" with free downloadable posters at www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/covercough.htm.
- **Minimizing contact with others.** Whenever possible, persons should avoid crowded settings and unnecessary social contacts in order to minimize person-to-person contact. Persons with confirmed or suspected H1N1 influenza should stay home, except to seek medical care, and should reduce contact with others in the household.

Prevention and planning

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the CDC have developed the "School District (K–12) Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist" (www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/schoolchecklist.html) to assist local educational agencies in developing and/or improving plans to prepare for and respond to an influenza pandemic. The key planning activities in this checklist build upon existing contingency plans recommended for school districts/COEs by the U.S. Department of Education ("Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide For Schools and Communities," www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf).

"Building a strong relationship with the local health department is critical for developing a meaningful plan."

—U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,
School District (K–12) Pandemic Influenza Checklist

In addition, CSBA's fact sheet on *Pandemic Influenza* (September 2007) presents a planning checklist that is applicable to planning for any type of influenza, including H1N1 influenza. The following checklist, adapted from that fact sheet, may serve as a starting point for districts/COEs

in determining appropriate steps to take in preventing and preparing for an emergency.

Emergency preparedness plan

- View the ReadyCASchool.org Web site for information on pandemic influenza preparation for schools, including fact sheets, guides, letters, posters, skits, teaching exercises and videos geared to different grade levels and addressing the following four topics:
 - Prevention and mitigation
 - Preparedness
 - Response
 - Recovery
- Form a committee to review and revise the district's emergency and disaster preparedness plan to develop a response to a flu pandemic.
- Determine the chain of command for the emergency plan and the individuals responsible for specific duties, such as quarantine.
- Invite the local health department, and other medical providers as necessary, to participate in the review and revision of the emergency plan.
- Review existing employee sick leave policies and student absence policies to ensure they are consistent with the emergency preparedness plan.
- Ensure that the emergency preparedness plan includes a crisis communications strategy addressing the pandemic status and response action with the school that takes into account cultural and language differences.

Collaboration with health community

- Participate in the local health department pandemic planning process to ensure that school interests are represented.
- Maintain contact with public health and education officials who can provide regular updates on pandemic status.
- Work with the local health department to create a system to provide updates on student and staff health, such as an increase in absenteeism that may signal an outbreak.

Prevention

- ❑ Promote current infection control policies, such as good hygiene with the help of the local health department.
- ❑ Reduce anxiety within schools about H1N1 influenza facts and myths.

Additional issues to consider

- ❑ Given that frequent hand washing is one of the simplest and most effective ways to limit a contagious infection, do the policies, practices and facilities in place promote or inhibit this preventative practice?
- ❑ Do emergency plans anticipate situations and events that might result from an outbreak (e.g., student and staff absences) and consider how they would affect student learning and school operations?
- ❑ If school closure is deemed to be the most effective means of reducing exposure to the flu, does the district's/COEs plan address subsequent impacts? Examples of challenges school communities with closed facilities may experience include: communicating with parents, the loss of meals for disadvantaged students, maintaining continuity of classroom instruction, adapting to schools being used as overflow emergency medical facilities, making up for lost days, alternative methods for instruction (e.g., Web-based) and maintenance of district county office functions (e.g., payroll).

Resources

CSBA

Pandemic Influenza Fact Sheet

www.csba.org/Services/Services/PolicyServices/PolicyAdvisoriesBriefs.aspx

Other student wellness resources

www.csba.org/wellness.aspx

American Public Health Association

APHA Get Ready Campaign

www.getreadyforflu.org/newsite.htm

California Department of Education

Swine Flu Updates/Prevention Posters

www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr09/yr09rel62.asp

Flu Prevention

www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/fluinfo.asp

Keep Our Schools Healthy Toolkit

www.cde.ca.gov/148645

California Department of Public Health

Pandemic Influenza School Preparedness

www.ReadyCASchools.org

Swine Flu Updates

www.cdph.ca.gov/Pages/default.aspx

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

CDC Swine Flu

www.cdc.gov/swineflu/?s_cid=swineFlu_outbreak_001

CDC Emergency Updates on Twitter

<http://twitter.com/cdcemergency>

CDC Guidance for Mitigation including school closing

www.cdc.gov/swineflu/mitigation.htm

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools

www.edgovblogs.org/duncan/2009/04/public-health-officials-offer-swine-flu-guidance-to-schools or go to www.ed.gov and click Swine Flu link.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

HHS One Stop Access to US Government swine, avian, and pandemic Flu Information

www.pandemicflu.gov

School Planning and Checklist

www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/school/index.html

U.S. Homeland Security Council

Swine Flu Updates

www.nationalterroralert.com

World Health Organization

WHO Epidemic and Pandemic Alert and Response

www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html

WHO Information on Influenza

www.who.int/topics/influenza/en