



2009 H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu)

IMPORTANT SCHOOL GUIDANCE FOR RESPONSES TO INFLUENZA INCLUDING H1N1 (SWINE FLU) DURING THE 2009-2010 SCHOOL YEAR

August 14, 2009

The following information is intended to provide a summary of guidance for schools to assist with planning and responding to upcoming H1N1 (swine flu) activity. The information is based on two documents recently released (August 7, 2009) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The two documents titled “*CDC Guidance for State and Local Public Health Officials and School Administrators for School (K-12) Responses to Influenza during the 2009-2010 School Year*” and “*Technical Report for State and Local Public Health Officials and School Administrators on CDC Guidance for School (K-12) Responses to Influenza during the 2009-2010 School Year*” can be accessed at the following web locations:

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/schoolguidance.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/technicalreport.htm>

This document is divided into three parts:

Part 1: School Guidance

Part 2: Recommendations for outbreak similar to spring 2009

Part 3: Recommendations for outbreaks of INCREASED SEVERITY

Part 1: School Guidance

- On August 7, CDC released new guidance to help schools promote a safer environment for their students and staff and reduce exposure to influenza during the 2009-10 school year.
- The new guidance is designed to decrease the spread of regular seasonal flu and the new H1N1 flu while limiting the disruption of day-to-day activities and the vital learning that goes on in schools.
- About 55 million students and 7 million staff attend the more than 130,000 public and private schools in the United States each day. By implementing these recommendations, schools and health officials can help protect a fifth of the country's population from flu.
- This guidance provides a menu of tools to fight flu that school officials can enact, in coordination with local health officials, based on conditions in their area and what CDC and other public health organizations are learning about the virus.
- We know far more about the new H1N1 flu virus than we did when it was first detected in April. We know that **closing schools is not the best option in most cases.**
- With this guidance, we're providing a set of strategies that schools can use to stay open while doing what they can to protect students and staff, particularly those at high-risk of complications.
- The options schools use should match the severity of the illness that's being reported and local flu activity and should be discussed in real time with your presiding health jurisdiction.
- For an outbreak similar to the spring H1N1 outbreak, CDC recommends stepping up basic good hygiene practices like hand washing, keeping sick students and staff away from school and helping families identify their children who are at high-risk for flu complications and would benefit from early evaluation from their physician if they develop the flu.
- If outbreaks become more severe, CDC recommends extending the time that sick people are away from school, allowing people at high risk for flu to stay home, actively watching for signs of illness in students and staff and considering preemptive school dismissal in consultation with your presiding health jurisdiction.
- The recommendations will be most effective when implemented together as a package that combines good hygiene and practices to keep those who are ill separated from those who are well, with more active interventions based on the severity of the flu outbreak.
- We do anticipate more illness from the new H1N1 influenza than this past spring and more school-based outbreaks because influenza is typically transmitted more easily in fall and winter. The co-occurrence of H1N1 and seasonal influenza may further escalate the level of illness. By taking planning steps now schools can help ensure they're prepared for any future flu activity.
- CDC, local health departments and our partners will be continually monitoring the spread of flu, the severity of the illness it's causing (including hospitalizations and deaths) and whether the virus characteristics are changing. We will provide updated assessment of severity and revise guidance as indicated.

Part 2: Recommendations for outbreak similar to spring 2009

Hand Hygiene/Respiratory etiquette

- First and foremost, the new guidelines emphasize the importance of promoting basic foundations of preventing flu: getting vaccinated, frequent hand washing with soap and water when possible, covering noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and staying home when sick.
 - CDC recommends that all children aged 6 months up to their 19th birthday get a **seasonal flu vaccine**.
 - CDC recommends that all children from 6 months through 18 years of age receive the **new H1N1 flu vaccine when it becomes available**.
 - Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be used if soap and water are not available.
 - In places where alcohol-based sanitizers are not allowed, other sanitizers can be substituted but may not work as well.
 - If tissues are not available, coughing or sneezing into the arm or sleeve is recommended.
 - Schools should provide time for students to wash their hands whenever necessary and make tissues readily available to students and staff.

Exclusion period

- Those with flu-like illness should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, without use of fever-reducing medicines and regardless of whether or not they are using antiviral drugs.
- Parents should be encouraged to check their children each morning for illness and should keep children home if they have an emerging illness or fever.
- Medications that decrease fevers like acetaminophen don't prevent the spread of flu virus, so it's important to stay home when sick with flu, even if taking medicine.
- Those who are sick should stay in the home during this period and avoid contact with others, except to seek necessary medical care.

Routine cleaning

- People can sometimes get flu if they touch droplets left on hard surfaces and objects by those who are ill and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth.
- Studies have shown that influenza virus can survive on environmental surfaces and can infect a person for up to 2-8 hours after being deposited on the surface.
- School staff should routinely clean areas that students and staff touch often with the cleaners they typically use. Special cleaning with bleach and other special cleaners is not necessary.
- Environmental cleaning should not be the primary focus of influenza prevention activities.

Separate ill students and staff

- Students and staff who appear to have flu-like illness should be sent to a room separate from other students until they can be sent home. CDC also recommends that those with flu-like illness wear a surgical mask when possible.
- Space is often a challenge in schools, so it's essential that schools begin to identify this area now. It should not be an area that's used for other purposes like a lunchroom.
- Schools should limit the number of staff who care for ill students before they can be sent home.
- Those caring for students should wear protective gear, such as a mask, particularly if students with flu-like illness are unable to do so.
- Consider selectively dismissing students and staff

Part 2: Recommendations for outbreak similar to spring 2009 - continued

- Schools that serve pregnant students or medically fragile students* may consider dismissing schools if they cannot protect students from flu with classes in session.
 - * For this guidance, a medically fragile child is a child who needs intensive, life sustaining medical assistance or therapy, and needs assistance with daily living (for example, a child who uses an oxygen tank, has trouble moving, is fed through a tube, needs suctioning, or is on a ventilator). Many of these children need skilled nursing care and special medical equipment. These medically fragile children may have chronic lung disease, severe cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, immunodeficiency, or problems with their metabolism.

* Decisions should be based on the severity of disease in the community and should be made in collaboration with local and state public health officials.

Part 3: Recommendations for outbreaks of INCREASED SEVERITY

- If the influenza viruses circulating during the 2009-10 school year cause higher rates of severe illness, hospitalizations and deaths, communities should consider adding interventions like permitting high-risk students, such as those who are pregnant or have chronic medical conditions, to stay home and dismissing school.
- Except for school dismissals, these strategies have not been scientifically proven. But we want school and health officials to have tools in their toolbox that they can use if it seems like the right measure for their community and the circumstances.
- Decisions about what measures to implement should be made jointly by school and local health officials.

Extended exclusion period (Increased Severity Scenario)

- Under this scenario, people with flu-like illness should stay home for at least 7 days after illness onset, even if they have no more symptoms. People who are still sick after 7 days should stay home for at least 24 hours after all their symptoms are gone.

Let high-risk students and staff members stay home

(Increased Severity Scenario)

- Those at high risk of flu complications and their families may want to talk to their doctor about staying home from school when a lot of flu is circulating in the community.
- Schools should plan now for ways to continue educating students who stay home, through instructional phone calls, homework packets, internet lessons, and other approaches.
- Schools also must develop contingency plans to fill important positions like school nurses if regular staff members are ill or home with ill family members. Schools should identify healthcare workers in the community who would be willing to volunteer at the school.
- It will be important for those people who stay home to avoid becoming ill also avoid other places where they might catch the flu, like large public gatherings.

Part 3: Recommendations for outbreaks of INCREASED SEVERITY - continued

Active screening (Increased Severity Scenario)

- Parents should be encouraged to check their children each morning for illness and should keep children home if they have an emerging illness or fever.
- Medications that decrease fevers like acetaminophen don't prevent the spread of flu virus, so it's important to stay home when sick with flu, even if taking medicine.
- Schools should also check students and staff for fever and other symptoms of flu when they get to school in the morning, separate those who are ill, and send them home as soon as possible.

Keep siblings home (Increased Severity Scenario)

- Students who have an ill family member should stay home for 5 days from the day that their family member got sick. This is the time period that they're most likely to get sick themselves.

Increase distance at schools (Increased Severity Scenario)

- By keeping the same children together throughout the day, schools can help reduce spread of the flu.
- We encourage schools to try innovative ways of separating students. These can be something as simple as moving desks farther apart to more drastic changes such as rotating teachers between classrooms with the same students, and canceling classes that bring together children from different classrooms.

School dismissals (Increased Severity Scenario)

- School officials should balance the risks of flu in their community with the disruption dismissals will cause in both education and the wider community.
- Decisions should be made locally and can include dismissing when absenteeism is excessive, and proactively closing schools to decrease the spread of flu.
- Schools that dismiss students should do so for at least 5-7 calendar days and should reassess whether or not to resume classes in consultation with local public health officials.
- Based on the reason for dismissing school (in reaction to outbreaks vs. preemptively), the amount of time schools are dismissed may be longer.
- Parents should start thinking now about how they might handle a school dismissal, as these decisions may be made very quickly.

H1N1 RESOURCES

U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

<http://www.flu.gov/>

Cuyahoga County Board of Health

<http://www.ccbh.net/ccbh/opencms/CCBH/modules/hotZoneArticles/0052.html>

Ohio Department of Health

http://www.odh.ohio.gov/landing/phs_emergency/swineflu.aspx

Ohio Department of Health

http://www.odh.ohio.gov/landing/phs_emergency/panflu/pfschools.aspx