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Guidance for Schools/Child Care Facilities : Swine-Origin Influenza A H1N1 or Influenza-Like Illness

Updated: May 19, 2009

As more cases of swine-origin influenza A H1N1 or influenza-like illness are identified, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) is providing updated guidance for schools and child care settings. Guidance may continue to change in the upcoming weeks as the situation changes, and as more information becomes available.

This Guidance document provides information in three categories:

1. Surveillance and Prevention Measures for ALL Schools and Child Care Facilities
2. Enhanced Surveillance and Prevention Measures for Schools with Cases of Influenza-like Illness (ILI)
3. Factors to Consider with Regard to School Closings

1. Recommendations for Surveillance and Prevention of Swine-Origin Influenza A H1N1 in Massachusetts Schools and Child Care Settings

The follow recommendations apply to all schools in the Commonwealth, regardless of whether or not they are experiencing higher than usual rates of absenteeism. They are designed to help prevent the spread of ILI in school and child-care settings.

- Emphasize to students and parents, the importance of proper hand washing and cough etiquette in preventing the spread of diseases. Educational materials, posters, etc. are available on the MDPH website, www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu.
- Inform parents and caregivers that they should assess all family members (and especially all school-age children) for symptoms of influenza before sending them to school. ILI may include fever plus cough, sore throat or runny nose. It may also include other symptoms, such as vomiting or diarrhea. A Flu Symptoms Checklist is on the DPH website at www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu.
- All school staff should assess themselves for symptoms of influenza before reporting to work, and should stay home if they are symptomatic.
- Schools should consider screening students and staff for visible signs of possible influenza illness upon arrival at school.

- **Students or staff who appear ill with influenza-like illness should be promptly isolated and sent home. All such students and staff should stay out of school for at least 7 days even if their symptoms resolve sooner.** Students and faculty who are still sick at 7 days should continue to stay home from school until at least 24 hours after they have completely recovered.
- If a child or adult is ill with other symptoms, they should stay home at least one day to observe how the illness develops and until completely well for 24 hours. This period of exclusion can be shortened if it is found that the child is unlikely to have influenza, for example if an alternative diagnosis, such as strep throat, is made.
- School nurses and student health centers should report higher than normal absenteeism to your local health department or to the MDPH at 617-983-6800.

2. Recommendations for Enhanced Surveillance and Prevention of Swine-Origin Influenza A H1N1 in Massachusetts Schools and Child Care Settings

If cases of influenza-like illness are identified, schools/child care facilities should consider increasing their surveillance and infection control measures to limit the further spread of illness in their facilities. These measures are enhancements of what schools/child care facilities do during flu season to prevent illness in children and staff.

Because CDC and MDPH recommend testing only those who are seriously ill, or who have underlying conditions which put them at increased risk for complications from influenza for H1N1, schools should consider implementing these enhanced measures when they see an increase in absenteeism due to influenza-like illness. They do not need to await confirmation of H1N1.

- Monitor absenteeism in students and staff and follow up to determine if absence is due to influenza-like illness. School nurses and student health centers should report higher than normal absenteeism to your local health department and to the ***MDPH Epidemiology Program at 617-983-6800.***
- Screen students and staff as they enter school, during home room, or other appropriate times to identify anyone with fever and symptoms of influenza-like illness. Any child that appears to have ILI should be isolated and sent home. If the ill student or staff member has a cough, as well as fever, he/she should wear a mask (if available) until leaving the school to decrease the spread of the virus.
- If there are an unexpected number of absences in a particular class room or grade, screen the children in that class or grade to identify any that may have symptoms of ILI.
- Place hand sanitizer in each classroom to facilitate regular hand hygiene. Encourage younger students to use the sanitizer before snacks and lunch. Encourage older students that change classrooms to use hand sanitizer each time they change classes.
- Ask teachers or school nurses to demonstrate proper hand washing and cough etiquette in each class, and to explain why it's important. Educational materials, posters, etc., are available on the MDPH website, www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu.

- Send hand washing or other flu control educational materials home to parents and ask for their assistance in reinforcing these messages with their children.
- Distribute the Flu Symptom Checklist to families and ask that parents use it if they are unsure if their child is well enough to go to school.
- Consider increasing routine cleaning of classroom surfaces likely to be touched. This should be considered only as an *adjunct* to the efforts to increase hand washing, improve cough etiquette and keep ill children and staff home, because cleaned surfaces can easily become re-contaminated during the day.

Preparedness Planning: Schools and childcare facilities should prepare for the possibility of school or childcare facility closure before facing this decision. This includes asking teachers, parents, and officials in charge of critical school-associated programs (such as meal services) to make contingency plans.

Parent and Staff Reassurance:

Parents, faculty and staff may need to be reassured that the school/child care facility is taking appropriate steps to limit the spread of illness.

Concerned parents, faculty and staff can be reminded that illness caused by swine-origin influenza A H1N1 is similar to that caused by seasonal flu, so our responses should be what they would be for seasonal flu.

Influenza is highly likely to be in the school or community, whether or not there is a confirmed case. Parents and staff should assume that they could be exposed to this new flu at school, at work or anywhere else in the community. Therefore, it is very important for everyone to continue to protect themselves with hand washing, cough etiquette, etc.

Special Populations:

Some children or staff may be at greater risk for complications from any flu – seasonal or swine. These include:

- Children less than 2 years old
- Persons aged 65 years or older
- Pregnant women
- Children and adolescents (less than 18 years) who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy who might be at risk for experiencing Reye’s syndrome after influenza virus infection
- Adults and children who have chronic pulmonary, cardiovascular, hepatic, hematological, neurologic, neuromuscular, or metabolic disorders
- Adults and children who have immunosuppression (including immunosuppression caused by medications or by HIV infection)

Staff or parents of children who fit any of the above criteria should discuss their specific situation with their doctor, just as they do when regular flu season starts.

3. Decisions about School Closing

In order to limit the spread of swine-origin Influenza A H1N1, MDPH has recommended a policy focused on keeping all students with symptoms of influenza out of school and related school activities during their period of illness and recuperation, when those students are potentially infectious to others.

However, the Department recognizes that, on a case-by-case basis, some schools or childcare facilities may need to consider the closure of a facility because the presence of influenza-like illness has impacted the school's ability to perform its educational or child care functions. School officials are encouraged to discuss their situation with their local board of health and MDPH prior to making this determination.

In making the decision to close a school or childcare facility administrators should consider whether the following conditions exist:

1. Absenteeism that is substantially higher than expected for the facility at this time of year
2. Confirmation that the absenteeism is due to influenza like illness
3. Indication that the already high absenteeism is rising rather than falling
4. Inability to function due to high absenteeism among students and/or staff

If a decision to close a facility is made, in consultation with the local board of health and MDPH, the following should be considered:

- **Preparedness Planning:** Schools and childcare facilities should prepare for the possibility of school or childcare facility closure before facing this decision. This includes asking teachers, parents, and officials in charge of critical school-associated programs (such as meal services) to make contingency plans.
- **Response to school closures:** If a school or a childcare facility closes, they should also cancel all related school or childcare-related gatherings and encourage parents and students to avoid congregating outside of the school.
- **Duration of closing:** The duration of closings for school and childcare facilities should be for a time period to be determined based on ongoing epidemiological findings in their geographic area. *School authorities and childcare facilities should consult with their local boards of health and MDPH for guidance on reopening.*
- **Steps to Take After Reopening:** Keep in mind that flu will likely still be circulating, and there will be the potential for more cases when your facility re-opens. Be prepared to institute all of the necessary surveillance and control measures at that time.

Additional Information and Resources:

It is important to stay informed by monitoring websites such as those provided below. A listing of resources that are available on the DPH swine flu web page follows. (www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu).

Updated Case Count by County

[Updated Case Count 5/18/2009 \(RTF\)](#)

General Information

[Updated 5/05: H1N1 Flu \(Swine Flu\) Public Health Fact Sheet \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Amharic \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Arabic \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Chinese \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[French \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Haitian Creole \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Khmer \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Korean \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Portuguese - gripe suína \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Somali \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Spanish - gripe porcina \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Swahili \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Russian \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Thai \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Vietnamese \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

Information for Parents and Pregnant Women

[Updated May 4: H1N1 Virus \(Swine Flu\) Information for Parents \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Portuguese \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Spanish \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Russian \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Chinese \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Vietnamese \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Khmer \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Haitian Creole \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Information for Parents Concerned About H1N1 \(Swine Flu\) in Schools \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Breast Feeding Fact Sheet](#)

[Talking with your Kids \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[What Pregnant Women Should Know About H1N1 Virus](#)

[Information for Pregnant Women in Education, Child Care, and Health Care](#)

Resources to Help You Stay Healthy

[MA DPH Handwashing materials](#)

[MA DPH Flu Facts materials](#)

[MA DPH Flu: What You Can Do materials](#): Includes information on taking care of a sick person at home.

[CDC Materials: Clean Hands Save Lives!](#)

[Coping with stress \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

Resources if You Are Sick or Think You Are Sick

[Flu Symptoms Checklist \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Portuguese \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Spanish \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Fever Fact Sheets \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Home Isolation: Instructions for Patients with Suspect, Probable, or Confirmed Influenza \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Amharic \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Arabic \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Chinese \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[French \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Haitian Creole \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Khmer \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Korean \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Portuguese \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Russian \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Somali \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Spanish \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Swahili \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

Antiviral Factsheets

[Tamiflu \(oseltamivir\) \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Relenza \(zanamivir\) \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

Information for Employers

[Steps That Employers Can Take in Response to H1N1 Virus \(Swine Flu\) \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Resources for Business and Employers from CDC](#)

For Healthcare and Public Health Professionals

[Revised 5/18: Interim Guidance for Infection Control in Healthcare Settings \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Updated 5/7: Interim Guidance on Testing and Antiviral Treatment for Influenza H1N1 \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Updated: Interim Recommendations for Diagnosis and Control \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[FAQ: Laboratory Specimen Collection and Submission \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Respiratory Virus Specimen Collection Instructions \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Interim Guidance - HIV-Infected Adults and Adolescents: Considerations for Clinicians Regarding H1N1 Virus \(Swine Flu\)](#)

[Updated: Guidance for EMS Interaction with Suspect Swine Flu \(H1N1\) Patients \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Guidance for Non-Medical First Responders and H1N1 Flu Patients \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Interim CDC Guidance for Public Gatherings in Response to Human Infections with Novel Influenza A \(H1N1\)](#)

For School and Childcare Professionals

[Update Regarding Additional Cases in Schools \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[School Closure Reporting Form for School Administrators \(PDF\)](#) | [RTF](#)

[Guidance for Colleges and Universities](#)

Resources on the Centers for Disease Control Swine Influenza Website: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu

Taking care of a sick person at home: http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/guidance_homecare.htm

Infection control and treatment guidance: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swine/recommendations.htm>

School and/or Day Care Specific Resources:

All you have to do is wash your hands Podcast: This Podcast teaches children how and when to wash their hands properly.

<http://www2a.cdc.gov/podcasts/player.asp?f=11072>

Downloadable Flu Prevention Materials for Schools/Day Cares:

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

Preventing the Spread of Influenza (the Flu) in Child Care Settings: Guidance for Administrators, Care Providers, and Other Staff: Flu recommendations for schools and child care providers

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/childcaresettings.htm>

Protecting Against the Flu: Advice for Caregivers of Children Less Than 6 Months Old: Research has shown that children less than 5 years of age are at high risk of serious flu-related complications.

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/infantcare.htm>

Stopping Germs at Home, Work and School: Fact Sheet

http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper/home_work_school.htm

Ounce of Prevention: Tips and streaming video for parents and children about the steps and benefits of effective hand washing <http://www.cdc.gov/ounceofprevention>

Clean Hands Saves Lives: Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. <http://www.cdc.gov/cleanhands>

Hand washing to reduce Disease: Recommendations to Reduce Disease Transmission from Animals in Public Settings <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5605a4.htm>

BAM! Body and Mind. Teacher's Corner: In this activity, students will conduct an experiment on washing their hands. They will learn that "clean" hands may not be so clean after all and the critical importance of washing their hands as a way to prevent the spread of disease.

http://www.bam.gov/teachers/epidemiology_hand_wash.html

CDC TV - Put Your Hands Together: (Video) Scientists estimate that people are not washing their hands often or well enough and may transmit up to 80% of all infections by their hands.
<http://www.cdc.gov/CDCTV/HandsTogether>

Cover your Cough Posters: Stop the Spread of Germs that Make You and Others Sick! Printable formats of "Cover Your Cough". Posters only available as PDF files. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/covercough.htm>

CDC - Be a Germ Stopper: Posters and Materials: For Community and Public Settings Like Schools and Child Care Facilities). Cover Your Cough also available for health care settings.
<http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper/materials.htm>

"It's a SNAP" Toolkit Program materials to help prevent school absenteeism activities for school administrators, teachers, students and others can do to help stop the spread of germs in schools. See the hand cleaning section of the "It's a SNAP" site at www.itsasnap.org/snap/about.asp.

Scrub Club <http://www.scrubclub.org> Kids can learn about health and hygiene and become members of the Scrub Club(tm) at www.scrubclub.org. The site features a fun and educational animated Webisode with seven "soaper-heros" who battle nasty villains who represent germs and bacteria. Kids learn the six key steps to proper hand-washing through a webisode, hand-washing song, interactive games, and activities for kids, and educational materials for teachers are also available to download.