



Preparedness for Schools Swine Flu Event • Influenza A (H1N1)

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1.0 Introduction

Since the initial outbreak of swine flu in Mexico City a few weeks ago students have become one of the key hosts for the virus. This is not surprising since schools are a location where people congregate. Such a congregate facility, therefore, is a place where such viruses spread. The case of swine flu is no different from seasonal influenza in this regard.

What is different is that the swine flu is a novel virus. It has been reported that it is a combination pig, bird, and human strain – although preliminary genotyping of the virus “suggests that all segments are of swine origin.”¹ As a novel virus, humans do not have any ready immunity to the virus. In addition, there are concerns about the mortality associated with this disease because of the numbers of deaths in Mexico.

In the United States, the two initial Texas cases of swine flu (H1N1) were identified in students who attended the local public school. Based on this information and concern for others who may have or could have contact with them in the school setting, the local independent school district closed the 14 schools and associated activity centers. This provided an opportunity for social distancing. Other schools around the country and in Mexico have also been closed as a way to provide social distancing and to disrupt the chain of diffusion for this virus.

Therefore, in light of the event, schools may wish to consider ways to prevent infection and to respond if a student or staff member tests positive for the H1N1 strain. Specific recommendations are provided below. Generally, though, the best way to prevent spread of this – and other influenza illnesses – is to practice good basic hygiene.

¹ Source: www.promedmail.org. Influenza A (H1N1 “Swine Flu”: Worldwide (04) (28-Apr-09).
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www.cmcgllc.com and www.litakergroup.com

Note: Information in this briefing does not replace or supersede information from official sources

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Practice good hygiene habits

Practice good basic hygiene habits in the school or in any other congregate care setting (e.g. nursing home, day care, etc.). Teach staff and children the following:

- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or with the inside of your elbow – not into your bare hands
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Wash hands frequently, especially after coughing or sneezing
- Stay home if you feel sick, especially if you have a fever

2.2 Report any and all possible cases of influenza

Schools should refer possible cases of influenza-like illnesses to a physician for review and treatment. The physician should then report all cases to the local health department following appropriate reporting protocol. Data collected at the health department will then be provided to the state health department based on specified protocols.

From a school perspective, data on absences should be tallied and reported daily, as required by appropriate policy. If possible, schools should identify students who are absent due to influenza like illnesses. This can be an important marker for epidemiological surveillance.

2.3 School Closure Guidelines

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends the following school dismissal and childcare facility closure guidelines:

- Dismissal of students should be strongly considered in schools with a confirmed case of influenza or for a suspected case epidemiologically linked to a confirmed case
- Decisions regarding broader school dismissal within these communities should be left to local authorities, taking into account the extent of influenza like illnesses in the community
- If the school dismisses students, or a childcare facility closes, it should cancel all school or childcare related gatherings and encourage parents and students to avoid congregating outside of the school
- Schools and childcare facilities should consult with their local or state health departments for guidance on reopening. If no additional confirmed or suspected cases are identified among students (or school-based personnel) for a period of 7 days, schools may consider reopening.
- Schools and childcare facilities in unaffected areas should begin to prepare for the possibility of school dismissal or childcare facility closure. This includes asking teachers, parents and officials in charge of critical school-associated programs (such as meal services) to make contingency plans.

School administrators should consult their local health departments for additional guidance on steps appropriate for your community.

3.0 Additional Information and Useful Links

3.1 U.S. Department of Education

<http://www.edgovblogs.org/duncan/2009/04/public-health-officials-offer-swine-flu-guidance-to-schools/>

The above web page has been established by the U.S. Department of Education and contains additional guidance and information for schools related to the swine flu event.

This is a rapidly evolving situation. As more information becomes available and the situation unfolds, guidance is likely to change in the upcoming days and weeks. It is important for people to stay informed by monitoring websites such as the Department of Education site referenced above.

3.2 Hygiene Teaching Guidance

- “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>
- 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/>
- Downloadable Flu Prevention Materials for Schools/Day Cares
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/>

4.0 Contact Information

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