

Influenza Tool Kit

2009-2010 Issue 1

*Oct 16, 2009 – Wording clarified on absenteeism reporting requirements (Page 4)

H1N1 (human swine influenza) and Seasonal Influenza:

School Administrators Toolkit



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Note:

Both seasonal influenza and H1N1 (human swine influenza) are present in Nova Scotia. This document will help you address questions from students, teachers and parents regarding influenza. The attached recommendations will help to prevent and minimize the spread of both influenza and H1N1 in the classroom and at home, while protecting the health of staff and students.



Guidelines for Management of Influenza in Schools

- Remind staff, parents and students about the **importance** of frequent handwashing, coughing or sneezing into their sleeves or arms, and not sharing drinks, mouth guards, food, cosmetics, etc. Tissues can be used to cover coughs and sneezes but be sure to wash your hands after throwing out the tissue. These are **crucial** steps in helping to stop the spread of the virus.

Handwashing with soap and water is the best method of hand hygiene in schools, because the scrubbing action removes visible dirt, as well as microbes.

Hand sanitizer, while it can be effective, has some limitations. For example, if hands are visibly dirty, sanitizer may not completely eliminate viruses.

To that end, consider increasing the number of handwash stations. Where sinks are not available, supervised use of 60-90% alcohol-based hand sanitizer can be considered.

You can also keep extra tissues and waste containers in supervised areas, like classrooms. If you are providing extra dispensers of hand sanitizer throughout your school, we recommend locked dispensers that are permanently attached to a wall. They should be located in supervised areas.

- Encourage students and staff to wash their hands:
 - Before eating food;
 - Before and after preparing food;
 - After using the toilet;
 - After blowing nose, coughing or sneezing;
 - After helping a child blow nose, cough or sneeze (use a fresh tissue for each child);
 - After handling animals or their waste.

If children are not able to wash their hands independently, please remember to wash hands for them.

- Cleaning objects and high touch surfaces that are commonly touched by students or staff, such as doorknobs, faucets, sports equipment, computer keyboards, telephones, etc. will help prevent the spread of the viruses.

High touch surfaces should be cleaned at least once daily. No special disinfectants are required; regular cleaning products are sufficient for this purpose. Cleaning personnel should be educated and trained on proper cleaning techniques as per school policy. Schools should increase the frequency of cleaning during school hours and frequently replenish soap, paper towels and other handwashing supplies.

- Symptoms of both seasonal influenza and H1N1 (human swine influenza) are similar. They are fever and/or cough, along with one or more of the following:
 - Unusual tiredness;
 - Headaches;
 - Muscle aches or joint aches;
 - Sore throat;
 - Vomiting and diarrhea in children less than 5 years of age.



- Students or staff who are ill with influenza-like symptoms, regardless of whether it may be seasonal influenza or H1N1, should:
 - Remain at home until they are feeling well and able to resume normal day-to-day activities;
 - Avoid close contact with others;
 - See a health care practitioner if symptoms worsen.

Children who become ill with influenza-like illness while at school should be sent home with their parent or guardian and not travel on school buses. If there is no other option and the child must ride a school bus, it is recommended that staff ensure the child sits on a seat by themselves and is able to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue.

It is important that pregnant women speak to a health care practitioner if they develop influenza-like symptoms. Like any illness, should symptoms worsen, they should visit a health care practitioner.

Individuals who are at increased risk for complications from influenza, such as people with weakened immune systems, breathing or heart conditions, should watch their symptoms closely and see a health care practitioner if they worsen.

- Encourage seasonal influenza vaccination for anyone who is eligible.
- Encourage H1N1 vaccine when available.
- Advise staff and parents that further information is available at www.gov.ns.ca/hpp
- If you have other questions, please contact your local Public Health office <http://www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/contacts/phs-offices.asp>

Other measures schools can implement are:

- Create a dedicated phone line and web-based method where parents, students and staff can report illness;
- Record reports of illness and identify if each is a possible case of influenza;
- Maintain good communication with local public health services for guidance;
- Report to Public Health absenteeism exceeding 10% OR absenteeism that is higher than baseline levels as determined by the school which is likely due to influenza-like illness (ILI) or another common illness. There is no need to report one confirmed case of influenza (**Updated October 16, 2009**).

School Closure

- It is NOT recommended that schools close proactively in anticipation of disease or outbreaks.
- Closing a school in response to seasonal influenza and H1N1 activity is unlikely to be effective and should only be considered on a case by case basis after discussion with the Medical Officer of Health.

This information is consistent with the Public Health Agency of Canada's recommendations (see <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/h1n1/interim-provisaires0819-eng.php> for more information).



General Information about Seasonal Influenza and H1N1 (human swine influenza) for Staff, Students and Parents

What are seasonal influenza and H1N1?

Both seasonal influenza and H1N1 are acute viral illnesses of the respiratory tract. There are various strains of influenza; H1N1 is a new type.

What are the symptoms of seasonal influenza and H1N1?

Seasonal influenza and H1N1 share the same set of symptoms. They are fever and/or cough, and one or more of the following:

- Unusual tiredness;
- Headache;
- Muscle or joint aches;
- Sore throat;
- Vomiting and diarrhea in children less than 5 years of age.

How are seasonal influenza and H1N1 spread?

Coughs and sneezes release germs into the air where they can be breathed in by others.

Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transferred to the lungs when someone touches their mouth and/or nose.

How can I prevent the spread of seasonal influenza and H1N1?

- Wash your hands with soap and water, or use 60-90% alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available;
- Cough and sneeze into your arm or sleeve. Tissues can be used to cover coughs and sneezes but be sure to wash your hands after throwing out the tissue;
- Do not share drinking glasses, water bottles, mouth guards, cosmetics or eating utensils;
- If you are sick, stay home from work or school. Avoid close contact with others until you are feeling well and able to resume normal day-to-day activities.

If students or staff are feeling sick, what should they do?

If ill with influenza-like symptoms students or staff should stay home from work or school. They should avoid close contact with others until feeling well and able to resume normal day-to-day activities. For further information and advice contact HealthLink 811. Like any illness, should symptoms worsen, they should visit a doctor or walk in clinic.



What about pregnant women?

Pregnant women are at higher risk of complications if they get H1N1 (human swine influenza), so they should speak to a health care practitioner if they develop symptoms. Like any illness, should symptoms worsen, they should visit a doctor or walk-in clinic.

What about other high-risk individuals?

Individuals who are at increased risk for complications from influenza, such as people with weakened immune systems, breathing or heart conditions, should watch their symptoms closely and see a health care practitioner if they worsen.

Should staff or students with symptoms of influenza be tested for H1N1?

H1N1 testing is not necessary. If students or staff have influenza symptoms, tell them to stay home from work, school or other social settings. They should avoid close contact with others until feeling well and able to resume normal day-to-day activities. Should their symptoms worsen, they should see a doctor or visit a walk-in clinic.

What is the treatment for seasonal influenza and H1N1?

Because seasonal and H1N1 (human swine influenza) are caused by a virus, antibiotics are not effective. Antiviral medications can sometimes help lessen influenza symptoms, but they require a prescription.

Who will be treated?

Treatment (if any) will vary depending upon the situation. Physicians will decide about treatment on a case-by-case basis.

If students or staff have been in contact with someone who has influenza, and are NOT feeling sick, what should they do?

They should go about their daily routine as usual. If symptoms begin, follow the advice above.

Should schools be closed or events canceled if a student or staff member has been diagnosed with, or in contact with someone who has, H1N1 or seasonal influenza?

No. There is no evidence to suggest that closing schools or canceling events would help stop the spread of the virus.

Should field trips be cancelled?

No.



Should masks be worn?

The Public Health Agency of Canada does not recommend the public wear masks to protect against seasonal influenza or H1N1. Evidence shows that masks are not effective in preventing the spread of influenza viruses. People often wear them incorrectly, or contaminate them when putting them on and taking them off, which could increase the risk of illness.



Hand Washing!



Wash all parts of your hands:

- The backs
- Between fingers
- Under nails
- Thumbs

Wash your hands:

- Before eating
- After using the toilet
- Before, during and after cooking
- After changing diapers
- After handling soiled items such as bed linen, commodes, clothing, and toys
- After petting animals

Washing your hands with soap and water is the best way to reduce the spread of germs.