

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about H1N1 Flu:

Childcare and Schools

What is novel H1N1?

H1N1 flu is a new virus, similar to the regular seasonal flu. The highest number of cases has been in people between the ages of 5 and 24 years old. The severity of the disease varies from very mild symptoms to severe illness that could result in death.

What are the signs and symptoms of H1N1? Are symptoms different in children?

Signs of flu include having two or more of these symptoms: fever, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat and cough, body aches, headache, chills, and extreme tiredness. Some people may also experience vomiting and diarrhea.

Signs of flu are not different in children, but sometimes harder to recognize. Watch for these emergency warning signs that need fast medical attention. These signs include one or more of the following:

- Fast breathing, trouble breathing, shortness of breath, or stopping breathing
- Blueish, purplish or gray skin around lips and inside or mouth
- Not drinking enough fluids, refusing to drink or eat
- Acting irritable or not interacting with others (quiet and showing no interest in playing)
- Pain or pressure in the chest and stomach

What steps can schools and childcare programs take to make sure kids and staff stay healthy?

- Practice and model good hand hygiene. Wash hands with soap and water, especially if coughing or sneezing. Using alcohol-based cleaners is also helpful.
- Practice good cough etiquette. Cover mouth and nose with a tissue. If a tissue isn't available, cough or sneeze into an elbow or shoulder, not into hands.
- Conduct a daily health check of children and staff and watch for signs of illness, such as a change in children's behavior and signs or symptoms of fever.
- Immediately send children, students and staff home if they show signs of flu. Have them stay home and not attend school or go to childcare until at least 24 hours after their fever is gone, without the use of fever-reducing medicines.
- Encourage parents to get their children vaccinated for seasonal flu and H1N1. Also encourage staff to get vaccinated. It is recommended that students and other children, as well as staff most at risk for complications, including pregnant women and people with chronic medical conditions, get the H1N1 vaccine.

What other things can schools and childcare centers do to stop the spread of H1N1?

- Move children and staff who become sick to a space which separates them from others by at least 6 feet until they can be sent home. Limit the number of staff who take care of the sick person and provide a surgical mask to sick staff members to wear if they are comfortable.
- If a separate room isn't available, think of other ways you can increase space between children. Ideas may include moving play areas farther apart or moving groups of children to larger spaces.
- Clean all commonly touched items and surfaces. For younger children, wash and disinfect items they may chew or suck on.

How can schools and childcare programs encourage children to wash their hands?

- Give enough time for children and staff to wash their hands whenever needed.
- Provide enough soap, running water, paper towels and a trash can that is easy for children to reach.
- Educate families about the importance of cleaning hands.
- Teach young children to wash their hands by modeling how to turn on water, wet their hands, lathering with soap and water and having them wash their hands for 20 seconds-the length of time it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice.

What additional cleaning should be done?

- It is important to continue regular cleaning schedules. Disinfecting items that are already cleaned is not recommended.

What should schools and childcare centers tell parents?

- Encourage parents to get their children, ages 6 months-5 years vaccinated for the seasonal flu and H1N1, once vaccines are available.
- Ask parents to stay home and keep their child home from school or childcare if either they or their child is sick. They should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever or signs of fever.
- Encourage parents to make plans for back-up childcare if the school or childcare program they attend closes. Some ideas include sharing the responsibility with other family members or the parents of their children’s friends.

Will schools be required to track absenteeism rates?

An illness report form is included in your packets for review. It is not recommended to track absenteeism closely, only to monitor large increases in absenteeism. Report any concerns you have to your local health department.

Additional Resources

Template letter/email to students and parents:

www.flu.gov/plan/school/higheredtoolkit.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Toolkit for childcare programs

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

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Toolkit for schools

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

Department of Education: K-12 School Preparation

<http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/pandemic/index.html>

Pandemic Flu: Additional Resources for Childcare and Early Childcare Programs

<http://pandemicflu.gov/professional/school/additionalresources.html>

For more information on Child Care and Schools and H1N1, call the City of Milwaukee Health Department at 414-286-3521.