

Guidance for School (K-12) Responses to Influenza during the 2009-2010 School Year

August 25, 2009

INTRODUCTION

This document provides brief guidance to help decrease the spread of flu among students and school staff during the 2009-2010 school year. This document has two sections: 1) recommended actions with conditions in Harris County being of similar severity to spring 2009 and 2) recommended actions if public health officials find that the flu starts causing more severe impact than was seen in spring 2009. *Public health officials will consider several factors when determining impact, such as illness severity, disease spread, health care system capacity, etc.*

Additional detailed information can be found in the following three documents from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- 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:
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/schoolguidance.htm>
- 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:
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/technicalreport.htm>
- Preparing for the Flu: A Communication Toolkit for Schools (Grades K-12):
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/toolkit/>

For more general information on novel H1N1 influenza, please visit www.hcphe.org, www.cdc.gov, or www.flu.gov.

SECTION 1: ACTIONS SCHOOLS SHOULD IMPLEMENT NOW

Under conditions with similar severity as in spring 2009

- **Stay home when sick:**
Students and staff with flu-like illness should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines. They should stay home even if they are taking antiviral drugs.
- **Separate ill students and staff:**
Students and staff who appear to have flu-like illness should be sent to a room where ill persons can be cared for separate from others until they can be sent home. Public health officials recommend that the ill persons and the person caring for them wear a surgical mask, if tolerated and possible.
- **Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette:**
Encourage students and staff to wash hands frequently with soap and water when possible, or to use hand sanitizers. Cover noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or a shirt sleeve or elbow if no tissue is available).
- **Routine cleaning:**
School staff should routinely clean areas that students and staff touch often with the cleaners they typically use. Special cleaning with bleach and other non-detergent-based cleaners is not necessary.
- **Early treatment of high-risk students and staff:**
People at high risk include those who are pregnant, have asthma or diabetes, have compromised immune systems, or have neuromuscular diseases. Those at high risk for influenza complications who become ill with influenza-like illness should speak with their health care provider as soon as possible.
- **Consideration of selective school dismissal:**
Public health officials are available to work with schools where all or most students are at high risk (for example, schools for medically fragile children or for pregnant students) to determine if dismissal is appropriate to better protect these high-risk students.

SECTION 2: ACTIONS SCHOOLS MAY BE ADVISED TO IMPLEMENT LATER

Under conditions with **increased severity** compared with spring 2009

- **Active screening:**
Schools should 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. Throughout the day, staff should be vigilant in identifying students and other staff who appear ill.
- **High-risk students and staff members stay home:**
People at high-risk of flu complications should 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.
- **Students with ill household members stay home:**
Students who have an ill household member should stay home for five days from the day the first household member got sick. This is the time period they are most likely to get sick themselves.
- **Increase distance between people at schools:**
Consider innovative ways of separating students. These can be as simple as moving desks farther apart or canceling classes that bring together children from different classrooms.
- **Extend the period for ill persons to stay home:**
If influenza severity increases, people with flu-like illness should stay home for at least 7 days, even if they have no more symptoms. If people are still sick, they should stay home until 24 hours after they have no symptoms.
- **School dismissals:**
Preemptive dismissals can be used proactively to decrease the spread of flu. Local public health officials may recommend preemptive school dismissals if the flu starts to cause more severe impact. Public health officials will work closely with school officials to balance the risks of flu in Harris County communities with the disruption school dismissals will cause in both education and the wider community.

Reactive dismissals might be an appropriate administrative action when schools are not able to maintain normal functioning for example, when a significant number and proportion of students have documented fever while at school despite the school having implemented the above recommendations.

The length of time schools should be dismissed will vary depending on the type of dismissal as well as the severity and extent of illness. Schools that dismiss students should do so for five to seven calendar days, based on local public health recommendations. The length of time schools should be dismissed will vary depending on the type of dismissal as well as the severity and extent of illness.

As always, decisions to dismiss school due to operational considerations (i.e. administrative dismissals) are at the discretion of school officials and are not based on public health issues.