

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR H1N1
FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION
(CDC RECOMMENDATIONS)

Q. How does CDC's new influenza guidance for schools differ from previous school guidance documents?

The new guidance applies to any influenza virus circulating during the 2009-2010 school year, not only 2009 H1N1 influenza. The new guidance recognizes the need to balance the risks of illness among students and staff with the benefits of keeping students in school. It offers specific steps for school staff, parents, and students to take given the current influenza conditions as well as for more severe influenza conditions. The new guidance also provides information for making decisions at the community level about when to use these strategies aimed at schools.

In addition, this guidance recommends that, based on current influenza conditions, students and staff with influenza-like illness stay home until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever or signs of a fever. This should be determined without the use of fever-reducing medications (any medicine that contains ibuprofen or acetaminophen). This is a shorter time period from the previous guidance which recommended that sick students and staff stay home 7 days after symptoms begin. The 7 days period away from school for sick students and staff would still be recommended under more severe influenza conditions. In addition, this longer period should be used in healthcare settings and in any place where a high number of high-risk people may be exposed, such as childcare facilities for children younger than 5 years of age.

Q. What is the difference between a school dismissal and school closure?

A school closure means closing the school and sending all the students and staff home. In a school dismissal, the school may stay open for staff while the children stay home. Keeping school facilities open allows teachers to develop and deliver lessons and materials and other staff to continue to provide important services.

Q. What are the different types of school dismissals?

There are three types of school dismissals:

- *Selective dismissal* is used when all or most students in the school are at a higher risk for complications once infected with influenza. For example, a school for medically fragile children or for pregnant students may decide to close, based on the local situation while other schools in the community may remain open.
- *Reactive dismissal* is used when many students and staff are sick and are not attending school, or many students and staff are arriving at school sick and are being sent home.
- *Preemptive dismissal* is used early during an influenza response in a community to decrease the spread of the influenza before many students and staff get sick. This is based on information about the spread of *severe influenza* in the region. This dismissal is most effective at decreasing influenza spread and burden on the healthcare system when done early in relation to the amount of influenza activity in the area.

No matter what types of school dismissal is chosen, all school-related mass gatherings should be canceled or postponed in order to decrease the spread of influenza among students, their families and staff. This includes sporting events, school dances, performances, rallies, commencement ceremonies, and other events that bring large groups of people into close contact with one another.

Q. What is a medically fragile child?

For this guidance, a medically fragile child is a child who needs intensive, life sustaining medical assistance or therapy, and needs assistance with daily living (for example, a child who uses an oxygen tank, has trouble moving, is fed through a tube, needs suctioning, or is on a ventilator). Many of these children need skilled nursing care and special medical equipment. These medically fragile children may have chronic lung disease, severe cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, immunodeficiency, or problems with their metabolism.

Q. How will the decision be made to dismiss schools?

School officials will work closely with their local and state public health and government officials to make sound decisions, based on local conditions. The decision will consider the following:

- Number and severity of cases in an outbreak (looking at national, regional, and local data).
- Risks of influenza spread and benefits of dismissal.
- Problems that school dismissal can cause for families and communities.
- Different types of dismissal (selective, reactive, and preemptive).

Q. How long will schools have to stay dismissed?

The length of time schools should be dismissed will vary depending on how severe the influenza is and how many people are sick. School and local health officials will assess the severity and impact of the influenza, the benefits of keeping students home, and the consequences of doing so. Based on this assessment, the decision will be made to extend the school dismissal or to reopen the school. However, if an influenza outbreak is determined to be severe, a longer time period may be recommended.

Q. Why would one school dismiss students and another school continue to remain open?

School action steps should vary based on the severity of the pandemic and the impact it is having in the school. Decisions for dismissal will be made based on the number and severity of cases in the school and community. Because the impact of influenza on a community will differ from location to location, the steps that are taken will also be different. Also, certain schools may have a large number of students who are at high risk for complications from influenza (such as school for pregnant teens). These schools may decide to close based on the local situation while other schools in the community remain open.

Q. What can a school do to prepare for influenza response during the 2009-2010 school year?

- Review and revise existing pandemic plans and focus on protecting high risk students and staff.
- Update student and staff contact information as well as emergency contact lists.
- Identify and establish a point of contact with the local public health agency.
- Develop a plan to cover key positions, such as the school nurse, when staff stay home because they are sick.
- Set up a separate area for care of sick students or staff until they can be sent home.
- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizers throughout.
- Purchase Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as masks for nurses and other staff providing care for sick people at school and those that are sick. Provide training for this staff about basic infection control and the use of PPE.
- Develop an education campaign to encourage hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
- Develop communication tools (e.g., letters to parents) that can be used to send sick students home, dismiss students, help families identify students who are at high-risk of complications from influenza, or cancel mass gatherings. Remind parents and staff how long sick students and staff should remain at home.
- Identify ways to increase social distance (the space between people).
- Review school policies and awards to encourage social distancing and avoiding any incentives for people or staff to go to school when they are sick (e.g., cancel perfect attendance awards).
- Develop a school dismissal plan and options for how school work can be continued at home (e.g., homework packets, web-based lessons, phone calls, cable TV, etc.), if school is dismissed or students are sent home when sick. Communicate this plan to all community members who would be affected.
- Collaborate with the local health department, community organizations, local businesses and social services on a plan for response.
- Help families and communities understand the important roles they can play in reducing the spread of influenza in schools.