

September 15, 2009

Dear Principals

Schools and the entire community are facing a difficult influenza season this fall due to the H1N1 Novel Influenza. H1N1 is a new virus for which the seasonal flu shot does not provide protection. In addition, influenza like illness (ILI) is already in the community which is very unusual for this time of year. It is expected, that with school back in session, there will be many cases in the next few weeks prior to the projected late October arrival of the vaccine for the H1N1 Novel influenza.

Your school nurse can help you plan for how your school will respond to the challenge of influenza. School Nurses have the background knowledge, expertise and resources to address influenza.

Education and Prevention

Teach students staff and parents about the importance of hand washing. Hand washing is the best prevention strategy we have. Provide planned opportunities and easy access within the school day for hand washing – upon arrival at school, before lunch, after lunch, and before they go home. One study has proven a 21-57% decrease in school absence due to illness by using these four handwashing times (*The Importance of School-Based Handwashing Programs*, Journal of School Nursing, (2002)18, 19-22.)

- Teach students staff and families to “Cover Your Cough”.
- Teach students, staff and families that sick individuals should stay home until well.
- Clean surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact such as desks, door knobs, keyboards with cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas.
- Plan for absenteeism of students. Teachers can plan now for student absences by developing homework packets, planning on-line assignments, arranging for make up work.
- Plan for absenteeism of staff, make sure crucial work tasks will be covered.
- Plan for illness. Students and staff with underlying health conditions should seek medical care if they become ill with influenza. They are also advised to have a plan made with their health care provider prior to becoming ill.

Identification of Influenza Like Illness

- **Cough or sore throat and**
- **Fever 100° Fahrenheit or 37.8° Celsius or greater**

Exclusion Criteria

People with influenza-like illness (ILI) should stay away from others for at **least 24 hours** after their fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medication. Please note that the current exclusion recommendation for early childhood programs is to stay home for 7 days from start of symptoms or 24 hours after symptoms are gone which ever is longer.

Reporting an Influenza Outbreak to the Minnesota Department of Health

The Minnesota Department of Health is requesting schools to report influenza like illness (ILI) outbreaks according to the following guidelines:

Report each day throughout the school year when:

- 1.) For all schools (including Elementary): The number of students with ILI absent or sent home reaches 5% of the total school enrollment** on a given day (e.g., a school of 600 students should report when 30 students with ILI are absent or sent home or $600 \times .05 = 30$).

OR

- 2.) For elementary schools only: Three or more students with ILI from the same classroom are absent or sent home on a given day.

AND

- Report every time one of the above thresholds is met throughout the year.
- Do **not** report subsequent days of the **same** outbreak.
- If symptoms of illness are unknown for an absent student, **include** this student in your count of ILI absences.

Influenza Vaccine

Seasonal flu vaccine is available now. The vaccine for H1N1 Novel Influenza is anticipated to be ready by late October. Your local public health will be able to tell you about how the H1N1 vaccine will be distributed in your community.

Resources

- **National Association of School Nurses:** www.nasn.org.
- **Minnesota Department of Health:** www.mdhflu.com
- **Centers for Disease Control** <http://pandemicflu.gov/professional/school/>
- **National School Boards Association:**
<http://www.nsba.org/MainMenu/SchoolHealth/H1N1-Flu.aspx>
- **Talking to Children About the Flu (Novel H1N1): A Parent Resource resource**

Developed in partnership with the PTA, the National Association of School Nurses and The American Association of School Psychologists:

http://www.nasn.org/Portals/0/resources/2009_08_talking_with_children_about_flu.pdf

There are many unknowns about how H1N1 influenza will affect our schools and our communities. We will get through this flu season by working together to support our students. Thank you for this opportunity to provide you with information about H1N1 influenza and to encourage you to seek the expertise of your school nurse as you plan and respond to this illness.

Sincerely,



Ann Hoxie
President, School Nurse Organization of Minnesota