

It's Not Flu As Usual

WHAT SCHOOLS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PANDEMIC FLU PLANNING



Imagine that ten percent of your students and employees are too sick to come to school on any given day. Imagine that cumulatively, a quarter of your student population could be out for as many as three to four months. Hard as it may be to believe, such a scenario could happen -- indeed, some health officials say it's inevitable. The cause: a pandemic flu.

What A Pandemic Flu Could Mean To Your School

Each winter, the flu kills approximately 36,000-40,000 Americans, hospitalizes more than 200,000 and costs the U.S. economy over \$10 billion in lost productivity and direct medical expenses.

Bad as that is, health experts are now warning about a far more lethal kind of flu – a pandemic flu that could kill over half a million in the U.S., hospitalize more than 2 million, and cost our economy a staggering \$70-\$160 billion.

A pandemic flu will spread rapidly and easily from person to person, affecting all age groups.

It will cause illness in a high proportion of those infected. Health officials are concerned that the avian “bird flu” emanating from Asia could mutate to a new strain of flu that humans have no natural immunity against -- the World Health Organization has said that a bird flu pandemic could infect 25-30 percent of the world's population.

With that much of the population and workforce affected, a pandemic flu could disrupt your school operations -- perhaps even force it to close down for a time.

THIS PAMPHLET OFFERS GUIDANCE ON HOW SCHOOLS CAN:

- Prepare for a pandemic flu in order to maintain school continuity
- Help protect student and employee health
- Work with health officials to minimize disruption

What To Do In The Event Of An Outbreak

If a pandemic flu strikes, government health officials will alert the public, and will disseminate information on how to avoid becoming ill. Your school's administrators, school nurse, and employees should pay close attention to the guidance provided by local and state health departments and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov). Other organizations that provide assistance in public health emergencies include the American Red Cross (www.redcross.org), and the World Health Organization (www.who.org).

In a worst-case scenario, “school as usual” may cease. Government health officials may have to implement dramatic measures, including shutting down certain businesses that involve high levels of interaction with the public, such as restaurants and theatres. Travel may be restricted, public events such as concert or sports may be cancelled, and even schools closed.

Depending on the flu strain and based on previous pandemics, public health officials project *cumulative absentee rates of 25-30 percent over three to four months*. Absentees will include sick students and employees, and those who must care for others who are sick. Fear will also impact rates of absenteeism.

Protecting Student and Employee Health

Flu is caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs, and is generally spread from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes. An effective vaccine, when available, will be the best safeguard against pandemic flu.

In addition, the following simple, common-sense precautions can also help. Recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, these precautions should be communicated to the student population and the staff and posted in common areas:

- **Avoid close contact with people who are sick.** If you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick, too.
- **Stay home when you're sick or have flu symptoms.** Get plenty of rest and check with a health care provider as needed.
- **Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.** It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- **Clean your hands.** Washing your hands often will help protect you against germs. When soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.** Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth.
- **Practice other good health habits.** Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage stress, drink plenty of fluids, eat nutritious foods, and avoid smoking, which may increase the risk of serious consequences if you do contract the flu.

SEASONAL FLU	PANDEMIC FLU
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Occurs every year during the winter months. ▪ Affects 5-20 percent of the U.S. population. ▪ Most people recover within a week or two. ▪ Vaccination is effective because the virus strain in circulation each winter can be fairly reliably predicted. ▪ Annual vaccination, when the correct virus strain is used, is fairly reliable and antiviral drugs are available for those most at risk of becoming seriously ill. ▪ 36,000-40,000 deaths in the U.S. each year. ▪ Deaths generally confined to "at risk" groups, such as the elderly (over 65 years of age); the young (children aged 6-23 months); those with existing medical conditions like lung diseases, diabetes, cancer, kidney, or heart problems; and people with compromised immune systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Occurs three to four times a century and can take place in any season. ▪ Experts predict an infection rate of 25-30 percent of the population, depending on the severity of the virus strain. ▪ The worst pandemic of the last century -- the "Spanish Flu" of 1918 -- killed 500,000 in the U.S. and 50 million worldwide. ▪ Usually associated with a higher severity of illness and, consequently, a higher risk of death. ▪ All age groups may be at risk for infection, not just "at risk" groups. Otherwise fit adults could be at relatively greater risk, based on patterns of previous epidemics. For example, adults under age 35 (a key segment of the U.S. workforce) were disproportionately affected during the 1918 pandemic. ▪ A vaccine against pandemic flu may not be available at the start of a pandemic. New strains of viruses must be accurately identified, and producing an effective vaccine could take six months. ▪ Antiviral drugs may be in limited supply, and their effectiveness will only be known definitively once the pandemic is underway.

SCHOOL PANDEMIC INFLUENZA PLANNING CHECKLIST

PLANNING FOR PANDEMIC INFLUENZA IS CRITICAL.

In the event of pandemic influenza, schools will play a key role:

- Protect student and employee health & safety.** When pandemic influenza is declared in the U.S. it would be a wise precaution to send home, at the earliest opportunity, any student or employee who has flu signs/symptoms. Retaining sick employees or students in the confines of a school building will increase the likelihood of further spread of the disease to the school population. Work through the logical impact on your school - which is all about people being absent for extended periods of time.
- Limit the negative impact to the school year, if your school was forced to close due to illness. **Do you have a plan for teachers to administer their class curriculum on-line from their home, for students to also work from home?**

PLAN FOR THE IMPACT OF A PANDEMIC ON YOUR SCHOOL:

- ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIPS with community public health and other key stakeholders for up-to-date, reliable pandemic information.
- Establish an EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PLAN and revise periodically.
- IDENTIFY A PANDEMIC COORDINATOR AND/OR TEAM, with defined roles and responsibilities for preparedness and response planning. Tell your workforce about the threat of pandemic flu and the steps the school administration is taking to prepare for it. In emergencies, employees demonstrate an increased tendency to listen to their employer, so clear and frequent communication is essential. In turn, students will also willingly listen to their teachers for guidance on what to do.
- Have a plan to TRAIN AND PREPARE SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS in the event of an absentee rate of 25-30%. Throughout the duration of a pandemic, it is likely that your workforce will be depleted.
- Review school district emergency response and communicable disease policies and procedure. Determine if any additional policies/procedures need to be in place.
- Identify school-based individual(s) to educate staff about pandemic flu.
- Identify school-based individual(s) to educate students about hand washing, covering cough, and staying home when sick.
- Identify individual(s) to educate families about pandemic flu and school plan - "Fast Flu Facts" at www.healthinschools.org/sh/influenza.asp and "Checklist for Individuals and Families" at www.pandemicflu.gov.

PLAN FOR THE IMPACT OF A PANDEMIC ON YOUR EMPLOYEES AND STUDENTS:

- Think about EMPLOYEE AND STUDENT ABSENCES due to personal illness, family member illness, community containment measures (quarantines) or school closures (child care).
- Ensure employees and students are EDUCATED about signs and symptoms and have access to healthcare services.
- Maintain a healthy work environment by providing INFECTION CONTROL procedures such as alcohol-based hand sanitizer and tissues to help prevent the spread of the virus. Ensure adequate air circulation. Post tips on how to stop the spread of germs.
- Consider how your school curriculum would function with 30% of the teacher and student populations absent. Look at alternatives such as staggered school times, changes in bussing, and telecommunications.
- Assess financial impact of alternate scheduling or school closures.

ESTABLISH POLICIES TO BE IMPLEMENTED DURING A PANDEMIC:

- SICK-LEAVE ABSENCES unique to a pandemic (non-punitive, liberal leave). Communicate with employees about the importance of staying away from the workplace if they become ill. Concern about lost wages is the largest deterrent to self-quarantine. Likewise, many student fear falling behind in their schoolwork, so will perhaps want to still come to school when they are ill.
- FLEXIBLE WORKSITE (telecommuting) and flexible work hours.
- PREVENT INFLUENZA SPREAD at worksite (hand washing, immediate mandatory sick leave for those employees with influenza symptoms).
- Identify individual(s) to ensure each room has soap/water for hand washing or alcohol-based hand washing product
- Distribute and post in each classroom "Germstopper" poster found at www.cdc.gov/Germstopper/materials.htm. Post a Three Rivers Public Health Dept. handwashing sticker in each restroom.
- Identify or review procedure for communicating possible school schedule changes, bussing changes, and school closures.
- Review procedures for sending ill students and staff home and make adjustments if necessary.