



fresno county office of education

August 14, 2009

Dear Superintendents,

Re: Pan Flu H1N1 in Schools

As the school year begins, it is imperative that you communicate with your staff and parents the importance of following CDC guidance on preventing the spread of the Pandemic Flu H1N1. The guidance is designed to decrease exposure to regular seasonal flu and Pan Flu H1N1 while limiting the disruption of day-to-day activities and the vital learning that goes on in schools.

While symptoms of Pan Flu H1N1 and seasonal influenza are similar, populations hit hardest by severe illness are different. Those at highest risk from seasonal flu infection are the elderly (over 65 years of age) and the very young (under 59 months.) With Pan Flu H1N1, the population that seems to be at greatest risk for hospitalization and death are pregnant women, children and young adults (6 months to 24 years of age.) Persons with chronic medical conditions are at higher risk from both kinds of flu.

The following are current recommendations from the CDC:

- Stay home when sick: Those with flu-like illness should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, without the use of fever reducing medicines. They should stay home even if using anti-viral medications
- Separate ill students and staff: Those who appear to have flu-like illness should be sent to a room separate from others until they can be sent home. Keep parent contact information up to date.
- Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette: Continue to emphasize the importance of basic precautions – stay home when sick, wash hands frequently with soap and water when possible, cover noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, or sneeze/cough into your sleeve.
- Routine cleaning: School staff should routinely clean all areas and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact. Do not use aerosol cleaners as this causes problems for individuals with asthma.
- Early treatment of high-risk students and staff: People at high risk for influenza complications who become ill with influenza-like illness should speak with their health care provider as soon as possible. Early treatment with anti-viral medications is important for people at high risk because it can prevent hospitalizations and deaths. People at high risk include those who are pregnant, have asthma or diabetes, have compromised immune systems, or have neuromuscular diseases.

Additional measures may be recommended if the influenza causes more severe disease.

- Active screening: Check students and staff for fever and other symptoms of flu when they arrive at school in the morning. Keep in mind that between 10-40% of people with influenza do not have a fever. Therefore, absence of fever does not indicate absence of infection. In a higher severity situation, schools should send home persons with symptoms of acute respiratory infections, meaning any two of the following: sore throat, cough, runny nose or fever.

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- High-risk students and staff members stay home: 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 with an ill household member should stay home for 5 days from the day the first household member gets sick. This is the time period they are most likely to get sick themselves.
- Increase distance between people at schools: Try innovative ways of separating students. They 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 the influenza severity increases, people with 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: School and health officials should work closely to balance the risks of flu in their community. Selective school dismissals are not likely to have a significant effect on community-wide transmission. Instead, this strategy aims to protect students and staff at high risk of severe illness and death.

Prevention is still the best defense. The following should be emphasized to staff and students.

- Cover your cough and sneeze with a tissue. Throw the tissue in the trash afterwards and wash your hands.
- Encourage staff and families to obtain regular seasonal flu vaccine and the two doses of H1N1 vaccination once they become available.
- Wash your hands with soap and water. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective and are indicated in the absence of soap and water.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- If ill, stay home and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

We encourage you to serve as a focus for educational activities aimed at promoting ways to reduce the spread of influenza, including hand hygiene and cough etiquette. Refer frequently to the website for the Fresno County Department of Public Health at www.fcdph.org for guidance. Continue to encourage students, staff, and their families to take personal responsibility for staying home when ill, practicing hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, and planning in advance for child care in the event of a school dismissal.

Should you have any questions or need additional information, feel free to contact Barbara Miller, Director of Health Services at 559-265-3026.

Sincerely,



Fresno County Superintendent of Schools