

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
HARRISBURG

THE SECRETARY
EVERETTE JAMES

THE SECRETARY
GERALD ZAHORCHAK

Information Update on Swine Influenza for School Settings April 30, 2009

The following provides updated information from the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH) in consultation with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) regarding the emerging swine flu situation. These recommendations are based on currently available information. However, since the situation is dynamic, recommendations are likely to change due to evolving circumstances. PADOH is committed to providing continuing guidance and recommendations to school systems throughout the Commonwealth. In addition, all schools should continue to monitor the PADOH web site (www.health.state.pa.us) along with other authoritative public health sources including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (www.cdc.gov).

Pennsylvania has had a robust pandemic influenza plan in place for several years that includes extensive guidance for the school setting as part of an overall community mitigation strategy (www.pandemicflu.state.pa.us). School systems throughout the Commonwealth have performed exercises and adapted the plan to their local circumstances. The guidance in the Pennsylvania pandemic plan should be examined because much of the information is helpful for the current swine flu situation.

Monitoring of students and staff

All schools in the Commonwealth should monitor on a daily basis the (1) absenteeism rate for any reason and (2) the occurrence of respiratory illness among students and staff. The signs and symptoms of swine influenza reported to date are similar to those seen with typical seasonal influenza. The following is the commonly accepted definition for Influenza Like Illness (ILI):

A febrile respiratory illness with cough, coryza, or sore throat in the absence of a known cause other than influenza.

At the present time, we are at the tail end of the winter influenza season. Although overall seasonal influenza activity in Pennsylvania is low, small numbers of cases are still occurring throughout the state. There is no way to clinically distinguish seasonal influenza from swine influenza.

Any student or staff member with ILI should immediately be referred to the school nurse for evaluation. In addition, any case of ILI in a student or employee should be reported to your local health department in order to discuss further measures such as specimen collection and appropriate interventions. Parents of the student should be notified in accordance with your usual procedures.

Multiple cases (also known as clusters) of any respiratory illness (whether or not it appears to be influenza) or any rise in absenteeism should be immediately reported to your local health department for evaluation and further recommendations.

Infection control in school settings

The key to controlling the spread of respiratory infections in the school setting, whether they are due to swine influenza or other respiratory pathogens, is implementing and practicing good infection control. This includes:

1. Cough Etiquette:

Always remind children to:

- Cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when they cough or sneeze—have them throw the tissue away after they use it.
- Wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after they cough or sneeze. If water is not near, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Remind them to not to touch their eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs often spread this way.

2. Hand washing:

Remind children, staff members, and care providers in child care settings to wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand cleaners, and make sure that supplies are available to prevent the spread of germs.

- Encourage children and staff members to use soap and water to wash hands when hands are visibly soiled, or an alcohol-based hand cleaner when soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly soiled.
- Encourage staff members and care providers to wash their hands to the extent possible when engaged in certain activities, such as after wiping the child's nose or mouth, after touching objects such as tissues or surfaces soiled with saliva or nose drainage.
- Encourage staff members and care providers to wash the hands of infants and toddlers when the hands become soiled.
- Encourage children to wash hands when their hands have become soiled. Teach children to wash hands for 15-20 seconds (long enough for children to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice).

- Oversee the use of alcohol-based hand cleaner by children and avoid using these on the sensitive skin of infants and toddlers.
- Rub hands thoroughly until the alcohol has dried, when using alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Keep alcohol-based hand cleaner out of the reach of children to prevent unsupervised use.
- Ensure that sink locations and restrooms are stocked with soap, paper towels or working hand dryers.
- Ensure that each room is supplied with alcohol-based hand cleaner when sinks for washing hands are not readily accessible. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are not recommended when hands are visibly soiled.

3. Exclusion of ill children and staff members:

Observe all students for symptoms of respiratory illness.

- Observe closely all children for symptoms of respiratory illness. Notify the parent if a child develops a fever (100°F. or higher under the arm, 101°F. orally, or 102°F. rectally) or chills, cough, sore throat, headache, or muscle aches.
- Notify the local health department so that appropriate guidance can be given, send the child home, if possible, and advise the parent to contact the child's doctor.
- Infants and young children can become quite ill with influenza very quickly and might require urgent medical attention and possibly hospitalization.
- If a child has difficulty breathing, is lethargic, or appears to be worsening rapidly, consider calling a physician or 911 in addition to notifying a parent.
- Encourage parents of sick children to keep their children home.
- Encourage sick staff members to stay home.
- Encourage parents of sick children to keep the children home and away from the school setting, until they have been without fever for 24 hours, to prevent spreading illness to others. Similarly, encourage sick staff members or care providers to stay home until they have been without fever for 24 hours.

4. Environmental sanitation

Keep the environment clean and make sure supplies are available.

- Clean frequently touched surfaces, toys, and commonly shared items at least daily and when visibly soiled.

- Use an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered household disinfectant labeled for activity against bacteria and viruses, an EPA-registered hospital disinfectant, or EPA-registered chlorine bleach/hypochlorite solution. Always follow label instructions when using any EPA-registered disinfectant. If EPA-registered chlorine bleach is not available and a generic (i.e., store brand) chlorine bleach is used, mix ¼ cup chlorine bleach with 1 gallon of cool water.
- Keep disinfectants out of the reach of children.

Influenza viruses, including swine influenza virus, do not remain viable in the environment for extended periods of time. Therefore, in circumstances where a school is closed (see below) because of a confirmed case or outbreak of influenza, extensive environmental disinfection prior to re-opening is at best an ancillary public health intervention.

5. Control measures for schools:

If a case of swine influenza is confirmed in a member of the school community (students or staff members), decisions regarding further actions and control measures should be made in consultation with your local health department and PADOH.

- The CDC has recommended that dismissal of students should be strongly considered in schools with a confirmed case or a suspected case that has an epidemiologic link to a confirmed case.
- Similar considerations regarding closure or cancellation should be made regarding large gatherings linked to schools with a confirmed case (such as a school prom, after-school event, or graduation).
- However, decisions regarding actions to be taken when a confirmed case is identified in a school setting should be considered on a case-by-case basis, as there may be circumstances where less disruptive alternatives to school closure or event cancellation can be employed.
- School systems are therefore urged to consult with public health authorities regarding these decisions.

Please go to a section with Frequently Asked Questions regarding school closings in the PA Pandemic Plan for additional information. This document can be found at:

<http://www.pandemicflu.state.pa.us/pandemicflu/lib/pandemicflu/schools/PANDEMICFAQ.pdf>

Questions 1 through 8 pertain to school closings, questions 9 through 14 pertain to the use of school facilities in the event of an emergency, and questions 15 through 25 pertain to the provision of education and services at the local level.

A brief, two-page document from CDC to help inform children and parents on cough etiquette and hand hygiene, “*Stopping Germs at Home, Work and School*,” is available at

http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper/home_work_school.htm and

http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper/materials/home_work_school.pdf (formatted for printing).