



COUNTY OF ORANGE HEALTH CARE AGENCY

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Guidance to School Districts Pandemic H1N1 2009 Influenza (“Swine flu”) Frequently Asked Questions

What do we know about the pandemic H1N1 2009 influenza (pH1N1) virus?

Based on currently available information, the pH1N1 virus causes an illness similar in severity to seasonal influenza (“regular flu”) and is spread in the same ways. Influenza is spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people. The symptoms may include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. One difference between seasonal influenza and pH1N1 infection is that 25% or more of people with pH1N1 infection also have vomiting and/or diarrhea. Another difference is that children and young adults have higher rates of illness and hospitalization due to pH1N1 than do the elderly.

What criteria are being used to determine if students should be dismissed?

If the severity of pH1N1 remains the same, schools likely will not be dismissed even with outbreaks at the school unless the level of absenteeism and illness interferes with school function or most or all of the children at that school are at increased risk of complications of influenza. Any decision to dismiss students from a school will be made on a case-by-case basis. If the pH1N1 virus appears to have become more severe than in the spring of 2009, the criteria may change. Guidance on student dismissal is available from the California Department of Public Health ([CDPH-Guidance-School-K-12-Response-Influenza-8-24-09.pdf](#)) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/technicalreport.htm>).

What is the duration of student dismissal?

If students are dismissed, the duration will be based on the specific situation. The CDC currently recommends that if students are dismissed the duration should be 5 to 7 calendar days.

Is staff included in the closure/student dismissal?

In general, closure/student dismissal applies to all activities taking place on the school campus or that would physically bring together at another location persons who attend, work at or are otherwise connected to the school. If students are dismissed, it is likely that staff of the school and school district could be present on the school campus if free of any symptoms consistent with pH1N1; this would be determined on a case-by-case basis.

How will Orange County Public Health assist a school that has closed/dismissed students in recouping ADA?

When Orange County Public Health recommends a school dismissal/closure, at the school’s request, a letter can be provided that will meet the criteria of the Education Code for recouping lost ADA.

What criteria should we use for allowing students with influenza-like illness (fever and cough or sore throat) back in school, whether or not they were diagnosed with pH1N1?

Students known to have pH1N1 infection (i.e., laboratory confirmed) should remain out of school until 24 hours after they are free of fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.

What if a student with pH1N1 has a sibling at another school?

Under conditions with similar severity as in spring 2009, a sibling who does NOT have symptoms can attend school but should be monitored by parents for fever and respiratory symptoms and kept home if either of these develops. Any ill sibling should remain at home until 24 hours after they are free of fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.

What should we do with staff who may have been exposed to pH1N1?

Anyone who is a contact to a case of pH1N1 should self-monitor for symptoms suggestive of influenza (e.g., fever, cough or sore throat) for 7 days after last exposure to the case, and, if symptoms develop, isolate themselves at home until 24 hours after they are free of fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.

What preventive measures are there for pH1N1 infection?

A vaccine to protect against pH1N1 infection is being produced and clinical trials are underway to help answer questions about dosage and adverse effects. Vaccine is likely to be available in limited amounts starting in October. Initially, vaccine is being targeted to those population groups at highest risk of severe illness due to pH1N1 and those who care for persons at high risk:

- Pregnant women
- Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel
- All people from 6 months through 24 years of age
- Persons aged 25 through 64 years who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza.

Further prioritization may occur if limited quantities of vaccine are available initially:

- Pregnant women,
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age,
- Health care and emergency medical services personnel with direct patient contact,
- Children 6 months through 4 years of age, and
- Children 5 through 18 years of age who have chronic medical conditions.

Check this website for local updates on pH1N1 vaccine availability:

<http://ochealthinfo.com/h1n1/vaccine/index.htm>

Antiviral medication, such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza), is NOT recommended as a general preventive measure for the school community. However, there are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these steps to protect your health:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

- If you get sick, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Do not share personal items such as towels or utensils.
- Standard cleaning and laundry practices are recommended.

Persons at high risk of severe illness should consult with their healthcare provider before they experience illness to discuss whether or not antiviral treatment would be recommended for them and, if so, how they can quickly obtain a prescription if they develop symptoms.

When should we notify parents if there is a case of pH1N1 illness or an outbreak at a school?

Schools should follow their usual notification policies regarding communicable diseases. Having a student or staff member with laboratory-confirmed pH1N1 or a cluster of illnesses consistent with influenza at a school does not change the preventive actions that people should be taking. Unless a large outbreak occurs that results in student dismissal (see above on criteria for student dismissal), there is no additional specific action to take other than reinforcing the prevention measures outlined above. A school may choose to notify parents in order to address rumors or to reinforce the preventive measures and remind persons at high risk of severe illness to contact their physician right away if they develop symptoms consistent with influenza.

What type of cleaning or disinfection should take place after a case of pH1N1 or a cluster of illness is identified at a school?

Influenza viruses do not survive long in the environment (2 to 8 hours) and are not difficult to kill. Whether or not the school has had a case of laboratory-confirmed pH1N1 infection or a cluster of illness, school staff should routinely clean, with the cleaners they normally use, surfaces that students and staff touch often. Visibly soiled areas should be cleaned promptly. Special cleaning with bleach or other non-routine preparations is not necessary in response to pH1N1 or other influenza virus cases at a school.

Where can I get more information?

Additional pH1N1 resources for schools are available from:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/>

California Department of Public Health: <http://ww2.cdph.ca.gov/>; swine flu hotline: 1-888-865-0564

California Department of Education: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/h1n1flu.asp>

Orange County Health Care Agency: <http://ochealthinfo.com/h1n1> and

<http://healthdisasteroc.org/flu/schools.htm>

Orange County Department of Education: <http://fluinformation.ocde.us/Page3562.aspx>