



New Hampshire Health Alert Network

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Message Type: Update NH-HAN 20090425 Swine Influenza
Status: Actual
Severity: Moderate
Sensitive: Not Sensitive
Message Identifier: NH-HAN #200905041 Updated Guidance on School Response to H1N1
Delivery Time: 6 hours
Acknowledgement: No
Originating Agency: NH Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health Services

DATE: May 4, 2009

TIME: 8:30 PM EDT

TO: NH Schools, Daycare Providers, AHHR, DPHS Management Team, Investigation Team, Manchester Health Department, Nashua Health Department

FROM: José T. Montero, MD, Director of the NH Division of Public Health Services

SUBJECT: Updated Guidance on School Responses to Swine Flu Outbreak

This advisory is to inform you of a change in the Division of Public Health's (DPHS) policy recommendations on closing New Hampshire schools due to H1N1 (swine) influenza. For more detailed clinical guidance please refer to the NH-HAN #20090504 H1N1 (Swine) Flu Clinical Guidance - Revision 3.

Background

Over the past week, consistent with national guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and in collaboration with school officials in New Hampshire, the Division of Public Health Services (DPHS) has recommended temporary closure of schools in the event they were attended by children confirmed to have influenza A H1N1 (Swine flu). At the onset of this outbreak of a previously unknown influenza virus, we believed it prudent to advise closure of affected schools while we learned more about the characteristics of this new disease and the strategy for community measures to prevent illness. We appreciate the collaboration of parents, students and school officials during this early stage of the outbreak. The closures have provided valuable time for us to gather information about this new H1N1 influenza strain in our community.

Based on the most current information, DPHS is modifying our approach for responding to the new H1N1 strain in New Hampshire. Rather than continuing to advise individual schools on closure based on the diagnosis of cases of influenza A H1N1 in students or staff, we will instead implement a statewide policy that focuses on keeping all students with symptoms of influenza out of school during their period of illness and recuperation, when they are potentially infectious to others. This change in policy is an enhanced version of the approach that we use during our yearly influenza season.

Recommendations for disease control measures in the community, including schools, are informed by what we know about the illness and its spread, and the practicality and consequences of the measures, including personal, family and community disruption.

- Epidemiological information from our case investigations and surveillance system suggests that this new strain has spread more widely in our community and will continue, at least for a time, to be transmitted from person to person, including children.
- Available information from local health care providers, emergency departments and hospitals, as well as information from other states, suggests that the severity of illness from the new A H1N1 influenza strain is not greater than the typical seasonal influenza that circulates in our community every year.

In short, school closure makes less sense at this time in the outbreak given what we are observing about disease transmission and the severity of illness currently associated with this A H1N1 strain. As the illness becomes more common in the community, individualized school closure based on reports of diagnosed cases is less effective, in addition to being impractical, as a control measure. Laboratory diagnosis, which is the basis of case reporting, will identify a smaller and smaller proportion of total cases as demand for testing outstrips capacity and as many students and other persons in the community with mild illness do not seek medical attention. Even now, we may not be diagnosing most influenza A H1N1 cases. Closing the schools where cases happen to be diagnosed while leaving most schools with undiagnosed cases open does not make sense as an ongoing influenza control strategy in our community.

One alternative would be to close all schools or to close all schools with any student with an influenza-like illness (which would quickly become most, if not all schools). Such a drastic step does not seem warranted by the current situation. School closures create disruption for student learning and hardships for family budgets, particularly in these difficult economic times. In addition, statewide school closure would not be in accordance with the U.S. national strategy for pandemic influenza, which recommends ongoing community-wide closure of all schools and daycare centers *during severe outbreaks* and in combination with other restrictive measures. Current CDC guidance on school closure decisions is flexible, allowing local public health authorities to base decisions on the local situation.

New Recommendations to Decrease Influenza AH1N1 in New Hampshire Schools

- Maintain general health and hygiene activities in your school. Remind all students and staff of the importance of regular hand-washing and use of alcohol hand gels, no sharing of drinking containers, and coughing/sneezing into the elbow.
- Each morning, all parents/caregivers should assess all family members and especially all school-age children for symptoms of influenza (fever and cough or sore throat cough) or other symptoms that might be influenza.
- Each morning all school faculty and staff should assess themselves for symptoms of influenza.
- All students, staff or faculty with influenza-like illness (fever and cough or sore throat) should stay home and not attend school. Students should stay home for 24 hours after major symptoms have resolved (fever, rhinorrhea).
- All students, staff and faculty with probable or confirmed H1N1 influenza should stay out of school for at least 7 days even if their symptoms resolve sooner. Students and faculty who are still sick at 7 days should continue to stay home from school until at least 24 hours after they have completely recovered.
- Schools should remain vigilant for students and staff with visible signs of possible influenza like illness upon arrival at school. Students and staff who appear ill at arrival or become ill at school should be promptly isolated and sent home. Persons who are ill should stay home and not go into the community unless they need medical care.
- As always, situations can be individualized and school authorities may close school at their discretion. Parents may use their judgment regarding the risk and benefits of sending their children to school during this influenza outbreak as they would during a seasonal influenza outbreak.

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- Schools will not be routinely ordered closed by DPHS on the basis of a diagnosis of suspected or confirmed cases of influenza A H1N1. As is our practice with seasonal influenza, schools may be closed if larger numbers of students or faculty become ill and school functioning becomes disrupted.
 - As always, school nurses should report higher than normal absenteeism to NH DHHS Communicable Disease Section 603-271-4496.
 - We do not recommend canceling any events or closing any schools at this time. We recommend consulting with NH DHHS Communicable Disease Section before considering any actions outside of your standard protocols and outside the scope of this guidance.

We are still in the early stages of this outbreak and the situation may change. DPHS will continue to monitor information both locally and nationally and continually assess whether changes are needed in these or other A H1N1 influenza disease control measures.

Please refer to the CDC website for daily updates on the outbreak and publication of interim guidance at: <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>

For any questions regarding the contents of this message, please contact NH DHHS Communicable Disease Control and Surveillance Section at 603-271-4496 (after hours 1-800-852-3345 ext.5300).

DEFINITION OF TERMS AND ALERTING VOCABULARY

Message Type

- Alert: Indicates an original alert
Update: Indicates prior alert has been updated and superseded
Cancel: Indicates prior alert has been cancelled
Error: Indicates prior alert has been retracted

Status

- Actual: Communication or alert refers to a live event
Exercise: Designated recipients must respond to the communication or alert
Test: Communication or alert is related to a technical, system test and should be disregarded

Severity

- Extreme: Extraordinary threat to life or property
Severe: Significant threat to life or property
Moderate: Possible threat to life or property
Minor: Minimal threat to life or property
Unknown: Unknown threat to life or property

Sensitive

- Sensitive: Indicates the alert contains sensitive content
Not Sensitive: Indicates non-sensitive content

Message Identifier: A unique alert identifier that is generated upon alert activation.

Delivery Time: Indicates the timeframe for delivery of the alert.

Acknowledgement: Indicates whether an acknowledgement on the part of the recipient is required to confirm that the alert was received, and the timeframe in which a response is required.

Originating Agency: A guaranteed unique identifier for the agency originating the alert.

Alerting Program: The program sending the alert or engaging in alerts and communications using PHIN Communication and Alerting (PCA) as a vehicle for their delivery.

You have received this message based upon the information contained within our emergency notification database.

If you have a different or additional e-mail or fax address that you would prefer to be used please contact:

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