



Parents /Guardians: Influenza Information for Schools

Fact sheet: September 2009

1. Novel (new) influenza A (H1N1) is a new influenza virus.

Initially referred to as “Swine flu”, Novel A (H1N1) influenza was first detected in Mexico in April 2009 and has since spread worldwide through person-to-person transmission. Many of the first cases were severe and some deaths were attributed to the infection and its complications. In June 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) signaled that an influenza ‘pandemic’ was underway. Confirmed cases of both annual flu and pandemic flu have already been reported in Bermuda in the “first wave” of infection. These cases have been mild with no hospitalizations, secondary cases or deaths.

The Department of Health expects a “second wave” to occur later this year.

2. How does influenza spread?

Influenza virus is spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people infected with influenza. It is also transmitted by hand nose and mouth contact with articles which have been contaminated with flu virus. Spread of the novel influenza A (H1N1) virus is thought to occur in the same way to seasonal influenza. The incubation period between exposure and developing symptoms is about 1-4 days for both types of flu. Children are highly efficient ‘spreaders’ of influenza infection, both between each other at school, and to adults and families in the community.

3. What are the common symptoms of influenza?

The symptoms of pandemic influenza are similar to those of seasonal influenza but can sometimes be more severe and can affect younger populations. Symptoms include:

- Fever, usually over 101F, 38C and generally feeling ill. Some cases of pandemic flu may only have mild fever.
- Headache, chills, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, fatigue.

4. How can influenza be prevented?

- **Vaccines:** a. Annual seasonal influenza vaccine is usually available by late October each year.
b. Novel A (H1N1) vaccine is not expected to be available until November 2009.
Distribution of A (H1N1) is likely to be on a priority basis initially.
- **Reducing Transmission:** The chance of becoming infected can be reduced by following these simple steps: ‘Cover your Cough’, always use tissues for sneezes and runny noses & dispose of them carefully, wash your hands frequently, and observe ‘social distancing’ as much as possible when in crowded places.

5. How can influenza be treated?

- **Supportive medical care.** If you think your child has influenza, keep him/her at home and call your health care provider. Follow directions regarding reducing fever and hydration. Remember that children should **not be given aspirin** to reduce fever because of the risk of Reyes syndrome.
- **Medication.** Healthy children older than 5 years, and adults do not usually require antiviral treatment unless their illness persists or worsens. Antiviral medication may be indicated for children and adults who are severely ill or for those at risk of serious complications due to a pre-existing medical condition; also, for children under the age of five years as this age group is at increased risk of more severe illness. In people at high risk, early treatment can prevent hospitalizations and deaths.

6. What are the emergency warning signs in children?

Some signs that indicate urgent medical attention is needed:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing; bluish or grey skin colour; not drinking enough fluids; severe or persistent vomiting; not waking up or not interacting; being so irritable that the child does not want to be held; if flu-like symptoms improve but later return with fever and a worse cough.

7. Can my child attend school if he/she may have been exposed to influenza?

Yes – children may continue to attend school after contact with a flu case.

However, any individual, (including care givers, teachers, parents, children) who may have been exposed to someone suspected of having flu, should monitor their health for 7 days following the exposure.

They can continue to work and attend school or day care as usual unless they become ill with influenza-like symptoms.

8. What do I do if my child becomes ill with influenza like symptoms?

If children become ill with influenza-like symptoms, (including fever, cough, headache, body aches, sore throat, runny nose, sometimes vomiting or diarrhea), parents/guardians should immediately:

- Contact your child's personal physician, giving details of body temperature and other symptoms.
- Keep the child at home except to seek medical care; sick children should not attend school, nursery or day care.
- Notify the school principal, or person in charge. You may also need to inform your employer.
- Inform the Clinic, Physician's office or Emergency Department about the possibility of flu before going there.
- Cancel or defer trips - do not travel by aircraft.
- Limit contact with others as much as possible.
- When your child is not alone or in a public place, adhere to the following:
- **'Cover your cough': cover nose and mouth with single-use tissue,**
- **Dispose of tissues properly,**
- **Frequent hand washing with soap & water, with proper drying of hands, and/or by**
- **Hand sanitizing with alcohol-based gels or foam,**
- **Keep hands away from eyes, nose and mouth,**
- **Observe 'social distancing': this means standing at least three (3) feet away from another person.**

9. Who is more at risk for complications of flu?

- A child or adult with a pre existing medical condition (e.g. asthma, diabetes, heart, lung or renal disease, obesity, compromised immune systems, or neuromuscular diseases).
- Children under the age of one year; women who are pregnant.

10. When can my child return to school after having flu?

- Students and staff who have been ill with fever (101F / 38 C) and flu like symptoms should stay home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (or from any signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications), and are feeling well enough. Decisions about extending the exclusion period should be made in conjunction with the Dept of Health for some high risk students.

11. Will schools be closed during a flu outbreak?

- It is not anticipated that schools will have to close unless there is a high absentee rate among students and staff that could interfere with the school's ability to function. Students and staff should stringently follow sanitary measures to reduce the spread of influenza. The decision to close a school would be made jointly between the Departments of Health and Education.

Individuals with additional concerns may contact the Department of Health Nurse Epidemiologist, # 278-6503, or, The Public Health Nurse, Communicable Disease Clinic # 278-6442.

References: (1) www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/schoolguidance.htm (2) Department of Health, Bermuda www.gov.bm/H1N1informatio
(3) Department of Education, Bermuda.