

West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources

Back to School: Preventing and Managing H1N1 and Seasonal Flu in the School Setting

Communication Points

August 26, 2009

The following key communication points are provided to assist you with media contact and to ensure consistent messaging.

- Influenza illness, including illness associated with the novel 2009-H1N1 influenza virus, continues to be ongoing in West Virginia and throughout the United States.
- We are working with state officials, the Department of Education and other local community partners including our schools to be prepared for the start of the school year. We know that H1N1 is still circulating and we anticipate that some cases will find their way into schools. The majority of cases have been found in those 5-24 years of age. So seeing H1N1 in our schools is very probable this fall. It is not uncommon to have seasonal flu cases or outbreaks in schools either.
- As part of our partnership with the Department of Education and the state, we are working closely with schools regarding the implementation of guidance issued by the CDC for preventing flu (both H1N1 and seasonal) and for managing cases and outbreaks when they occur in the schools. The goal of the guidance is to decrease the spread of flu among students and staff, minimize disruption of day-to-day activities and decrease the risk of hospitalization and death.
- Specific actions in the guidance are based on the level of disease severity. The guidance shows what schools should be doing now and what we may have to do if a situation worsens. The guidance encourages schools to identify key internal and community partners in making local management decisions now, encourages open lines of communications with parents, and establishes a framework for making decisions. You can see the guidance on the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu

- As part of the guidance, students and staff will be reminded to cover nose and mouth for coughs and or sneezes; wash hands often; and discard used tissues. Ill students and staff should stay home. These measures help reduce transmission of seasonal flu and H1N1. Many of the schools will have extra supplies on hand such as tissues and hand sanitizer in addition to more time washing hands.
- One of the things the guidance mentions is the need for schools to determine an area for isolation for students or staff that develop influenza-like symptoms during the course of a day. The ill students or ill staff member unable to be isolated would be asked to wear a mask. Nurses or school personnel who are caring for ill child(ren) in the isolated area should wear a mask.
- Siblings of ill students are not being asked to stay home.
- Schools have been reviewing their current plans for addressing H1N1. We're there to help them in any way we can.
- Looking forward, we will be maintaining contact with the schools to provide any updated guidance or information relating to H1N1 that our partners need to be aware of. We will assist with decisions for school closures or dismissals and share information pertaining to the local community as far as H1N1 is concerned.
- Some communities may handle H1N1 differently than others because the guidance is situation driven. Decisions are impacted by disease severity in that particular community, the number of individuals in the situation who are at risk of flu complications, feasibility of implementing prevention measures, etc.
- We anticipate a vaccine will be ready later this fall for H1N1. We encourage parents to have their children vaccinated for seasonal flu as well as H1N1 when it becomes available.
- **Additional information is available on the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources website at www.wvdhhr.org or by visiting the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/**