



School Closure Guidance

This companion document was developed by the Ohio Department of Health in collaboration with the Ohio Department of Education for use as a response to the H1N1 influenza pandemic.

Plans are nothing. Planning is everything.

Dwight D. Eisenhower



Department of
Education

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This document is a revision of the Ohio Department of Health's (ODH) *Pandemic Influenza Toolkit for Ohio Schools* (2007) for use during the H1N1 influenza outbreak. The original toolkit provided information for planning a response to an avian influenza pandemic. This companion document includes information for schools regarding prevention; surveillance; if and when to close schools; sample newsletters for parents; sample press releases and statements for school officials, resources and checklists for school actions. While revised for H1N1 influenza, it can be adapted for use in the event of any infectious disease outbreak. We hope this information is helpful.

If your school district does close one or more buildings, please notify the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) by calling Mary Lou Rush, (614) 466-2105, or (877) 644-6338 and submitting a completed influenza school closure by noon on the day of closure. The influenza school closure report form may be found online at <https://www.impactsiis.org/closing/>

This is a rapidly evolving situation, so be sure to keep in touch with your local health department in order to remain up to date on recommendations. If you, your staff or parents have questions about H1N1 influenza, please call the ODH information line at 1-866-800-1404.

A special thank you to representatives of the ODE, the Elyria City Health Department, the Ohio School Boards Association and the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services for their collaboration in creating a condensed document in a short time.

SCHOOL ACTION STEPS CHECKLIST

This is a brief summary of steps schools should take during an influenza outbreak. More detailed information is found later in this document. At this point, there are confirmed cases of H1N1 influenza in the State of Ohio.

Confirmed Case in Ohio:

- Contact your local health department to establish channels of communication.
- Increase influenza surveillance in your school/district. Communicate with the local health department regarding your findings.
- Educate staff on influenza facts and symptoms, provide information about prevention and begin planning for alternative learning strategies in case schools are closed for extended periods.
- Promote hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette among students and staff. Encourage students and staff to stay home when ill.
- Use Sample Newsletter No.1 along with the *Planning Checklist for Individuals and Families* and/or Sample Newsletter No.2 along with the *Coping with the Flu Outbreak: Tips for Parents* found later in this document to educate families.
- Use Sample News Release “A” and Sample Statement for School Officials “A” found later in this document, to inform the community that schools will remain open.

If you receive a report about a case in your school building/district:

- Gather information about the reported case.
- Contact your local health department for guidance. Often rumors about suspected cases are inaccurate, and many “suspect” cases will later be proven false. Your local health department can verify if there is a confirmed case in your school building/district and provide guidance for an appropriate response and recommendations about additional communication with parents.

School closure:

- Contact your local health department and follow their recommendations about closing a school building/district.
- Use Sample Newsletter No.3, Sample News Release “B” and Sample Statements for School Officials “B” (found later in this document) to communicate information about school closures to parents and the community.
- Tell families about any plans to return student medications or other health care supplies, provide nutrition to students who rely on school meals and make arrangements for alternative learning.

School reopening:

- Communicate with the local health department to determine the appropriate time to reopen schools.
- Use Sample Newsletter No.4 to tell families schools are reopening.
- Make arrangements to provide mental health services to students and staff as needed.

SCHOOL ACTION STEPS FOR AN INFLUENZA OUTBREAK

The following is a list of important actions schools should take before, during and after an influenza outbreak. A flu outbreak can have several cycles or waves so these actions may need to be repeated.

PREPAREDNESS AND PLANNING PHASE: Before an Outbreak

- Work with local health and emergency preparedness officials to develop your district influenza outbreak plan.
- Determine the roles and responsibilities of school staff to prevent the spread of flu.
- Train school staff in flu-symptom recognition. A person who is infected with influenza does not always show symptoms right away and the severity of the symptoms may vary. Have a system of disease recognition or standard surveillance in your school to notify your staff and local health department of increased absenteeism.
- Promote good hygiene of students and staff. Use simple ways to reduce the spread of flu by encouraging good “respiratory etiquette” (covering coughs and sneezes), frequent hand washing with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers (must be at least 60 percent alcohol) and clean work areas.
- Decide to what extent you will encourage or require students and staff to stay home when they are ill. Your local health department will provide guidelines in the event of a public health emergency.
- Identify students and staff who are most vulnerable to serious illness (immune compromised, chronically ill, etc.). Encourage them to talk to their health care providers regarding special precautions. Some parents may need to be more cautious in keeping their children out of school.
- Develop alternative ways of teaching including television or cable stations, teleconferencing, lessons on CDs.
- Educate staff, students and parents about the difference between seasonal flu, H1N1 flu, an influenza outbreak and pandemic flu, as well important hygiene practices to prevent any type of flu.
- Work with local health officials and emergency preparedness officials to determine if school facilities and resources may be needed as a part of your community response plan.

RESPONSE: During an Outbreak

- Begin heightened disease surveillance and reporting.
- Communicate with your local health department on a regular basis.
- Provide education and communication to staff, students and parents regarding school and community health concerns.
- Discuss with your local health department the possibility of canceling non-academic events and/or closing schools as a part of your community’s disease containment measures.

RECOVERY: Following an Outbreak

- Work with your local health department to determine when schools can reopen.
- Communicate with/educate staff, students and parents regarding school schedule and expectations.

- Continue heightened disease surveillance and report any new waves of disease to the local health department.
- Plan for the psychosocial needs of staff, students and parents following a pandemic.

SURVEILLANCE AND REPORTING

Schools are provided with the following information to monitor the influenza illness rate:

1. Common influenza-like illness symptoms.
2. Basic surveillance instructions.
3. Please contact the local health department in your school district as they may have specific instructions for reporting illnesses.

Common Symptoms

During all stages of a flu outbreak, it will be essential to monitor and document the number of students and staff who are absent and meet the definition of influenza-like illness. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), influenza usually starts suddenly and may include the following symptoms:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever higher than 100 orally • Headache • Fatigue • Cough • Sore throat | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Runny or stuffy nose • Body aches • Diarrhea and vomiting
(more common among children than adults) |
|---|--|

Keeping track of students and staff who are absent with flu-like illness will help health officials determine when and whether to close schools, whether there is an epidemic and whether the epidemic is increasing in scope.

Surveillance Instructions

A student with flu-like illness symptoms must be evaluated for fever. If a student has an oral temperature of 100.0 F or higher and is experiencing influenza-like illness symptoms (as described above), he/she should be excluded from school until free of symptoms. Please note that not all symptoms are present in all persons; however, gastrointestinal (stomach) upset without the above symptoms should not be considered influenza.

INFECTION CONTROL IN THE SCHOOL: PROTECTING STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Prevention

1. Encourage staff and students to wash their hands using soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 60 percent alcohol) frequently. Hands should be washed:
Before:
 - Preparing food or eating
 - Inserting or removing contact lenses
 - Rendering first aid or treating a person who is ill
 - Administering medication or completing a medical procedureAfter:
 - Any contact with blood, body fluids or soiled objects
 - Using the toilet
 - Assisting with personal hygiene, such as changing diapers
 - Touching animals or animal waste
 - Food preparation, especially after handling raw meat, poultry or fish
 - Blowing your nose, using a tissue or coughing or sneezing into your hands
 - Treating or touching open wounds or a person who is sick or injured
 - After handling trash
2. Teach students to wash their hands for 15 to 20 seconds, long enough to sing “Happy Birthday” twice if they are using soap and water.
3. Ensure sink locations and restrooms are stocked with soap and paper towels or working hand dryers. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers should be located in areas where students are supervised.
4. Encourage students and staff to use a paper towel to open restroom doors after washing their hands. Place a garbage can near the restroom exit to facilitate ease of paper towel disposal.
5. Clean frequently touched surfaces and shared items daily using an approved tuberculocidal agent that kills hepatitis B virus or a chlorine bleach-and-water solution made of one-quarter cup of bleach and one gallon of water. Discard bleach and water solutions after 24 hours. Keep cleaning supplies out of reach of children.
6. Encourage parents to keep their ill children home.
7. Encourage ill staff to stay home. Establish lenient sick policies during a flu outbreak.
8. Encourage staff and students to cover their coughs and sneezes using tissues or shirt sleeves, not their hands. Have waste cans for immediate disposal of tissues and encourage hand washing with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
9. Educate parents about the importance of respiratory etiquette and hand washing in disease prevention. Encourage parents to model the desired behavior for their children.

Caring for ill students

In schools, infection control for pandemic influenza should focus on keeping sick students away from school while they are infectious and promoting good respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene. Students may come down with influenza-like symptoms while at school. There may be a need to temporarily isolate ill students before sending them home to prevent the spread of disease.

Recommendations:

1. Each school should use existing student sickness surveillance procedures or establish procedures for identifying and reporting students with influenza-like illness.
2. Develop emergency contact procedures to notify the ill student's parents or guardians and arrange to have the student sent home as soon as possible.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

During a severe influenza outbreak, medical facilities may become overwhelmed by the number of ill individuals. Because children with special health care needs are at high risk of complications from influenza, families should contact their health care provider right away if their child has any symptoms of influenza. Families should be encouraged to ask their health care provider what symptoms would indicate the need to seek immediate medical attention prior to an actual emergency.

Additional concerns

In addition to students with special health care needs, your school may serve other families who may require extra assistance during a pandemic including:

Low-income students who depend on school-served meals

- Inform families of resources to obtain food and other household supplies during a flu outbreak.

Students and families who do not speak English as their primary language

- Take a survey of the different languages spoken by students at each school.
- If possible, have translators translate the school or district's influenza outbreak plan.
- Internet resources for pandemic influenza-related information in different languages are available.

MENTAL HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

Any emergency situation such as an influenza outbreak will have mental health effects on students, families and school staff. In dealing with the stressors of an outbreak, mental health professionals have two goals: to shape adaptive behaviors and to reduce social and emotional deterioration. Schools are critical social institutions where the physical and emotional safety of students, families and staff are paramount and are institutions with established means of communication with a large segment of the population. Schools can use these established communication channels to promote healthy habits and inform families about critical influenza outbreak information.

Planning and preparation

Preparing for and responding to emotional and psychological needs of students, staff and families is a critical component of influenza outbreak planning. Although it is impossible to prevent emotional responses to the crisis, it is possible to help people prepare for it and provide counseling and resources to those in need.

Unlike many disasters, an influenza outbreak will be a long-term event affecting large portions of the population at once. Below are psychosocial issues that need to be addressed when preparing for an influenza outbreak:

- Illness/death among colleagues and family members.
- Fear of contagion/transmitting disease to others.
- Sense of ineffectiveness and powerlessness.
- Prolonged separation from family/concern about children.
- Constant stress and pressure to keep performing.
- Domestic pressures caused by school closures, day care disruptions, family illness.
- Concerns about receiving vaccines and/or antiviral drugs.

Psychosocial support services should be incorporated into emergency preparedness and influenza outbreak planning. The importance of communication before, during and after an influenza outbreak cannot be overemphasized. Planning for the provision of psychosocial support services might include the following activities:

- Ensuring administrators encourage use of tools and techniques for supporting students, families and staff during the crisis.
- Training mental health staff in behavioral techniques to help students and staff cope with emotions during the crisis.
- Identifying additional resources such as community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations that are available to students, families and staff during and after the pandemic.
- Developing strategies to assist staff with child/elder-care responsibilities or other special needs that might prevent them from working during the outbreak.

During and after the outbreak

During and following a crisis, commonly experienced emotions include:

- Fear
- Panic
- Confusion
- Exhaustion
- Grief and loss
- Depression

Families may also experience reactions to loss of income, lack of medical assistance, loss of physical health, loss of routine and fear of the unknown. These issues may be exacerbated by:

- Lack of accurate information, rumors, misconceptions or conspiracy theories.
- Loss of faith in health institutions, employers or the government.
- Death of leaders in the response effort.
- Belief that medical resources are unfairly distributed and restrictions on civil liberties are uncalled for.
- Economic collapse or shortages of food, water or other essential services.
- Inability to perform rituals in response to massive fatalities.

During and after an outbreak, communication with students, families and staff will remain important. Schools can reinforce:

- **Health protective behaviors.** People should be encouraged to take care of their own health by getting enough rest, continuing to take prescribed medications and by limiting potentially harmful behaviors such as smoking, drinking alcohol and taking recreational drugs.
- **Risk communication.** Continue to emphasize ways to avoid becoming ill.
- **Safety communication.** Promote simple, clear, easy-to-do measures that will protect individuals and their families.
- **Education.** Educating students, families and staff. This informs, prepares and enlists them as public health partners.
- **Community-directed efforts.** Organizing communal needs and working toward tangible goals helps foster community resiliency.
- **Evidence-based principles of psychological first aid:**
 - Establish safe areas and behaviors.
 - Maximize self-care abilities.
 - Teach calming skills.
 - Facilitate family connectedness.
 - Encourage maintenance of natural body rhythms.
 - Foster hope and optimism while not denying risk.
- **Care for first responders.** First responders may require assistance to ensure the safety of their families to enable them to continue to function in their job.

- **Mental health surveillance.** During and after the influenza outbreak populations should be observed for post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, substance abuse, as well as for loss of critical structure to sustain community functions.

Mental Health Tips

Everyone will have different reactions and different ways of coping with difficult events in their lives. Some individuals may need extra support or even professional help. Long-term mental/behavioral health effects may be seen for months and years after a pandemic influenza outbreak.

Possible Mental Health Symptoms

Some signs that additional help may be necessary include:

- Difficulty communicating thoughts
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty maintaining balance
- Easily frustrated
- Increased use of drugs/alcohol
- Limited attention span
- Poor work performance
- Headaches/stomach problems
- Tunnel vision/muffled hearing
- Disorientation or confusion
- Feeling of hopelessness, depression, sadness
- Mood swings
- Overwhelming guilt and self-doubt
- Fear of crowds, strangers or being alone
- Impulse control problems
- Worsening of prior behavioral health symptoms
- Domestic violence

How to Cope with Feelings

- Even though it may be difficult, talk with someone about your anger, sorrow and other emotions.
- Promote your own physical and emotional healing by staying active in your daily life patterns or by adjusting them. This healthy outlook will help you and your family.
- Maintain a normal routine, limiting demanding responsibilities of yourself and your family.
- If your daily activities do have to change, explore ways to stay active in alternative ways.
- Stay connected with family and friends.
- Participate in memorials, rituals and other symbols as a way to express feelings and maintain feelings of normalcy.
- Use existing supports including family, friends, faith community and co-workers.
- Establish a family emergency plan. You may be comforted by feeling there is something you can accomplish.
- Be aware of and limit the amount of television coverage you and your family watch.

- Get assistance from a counselor or other behavioral health professional if the warning signs are serious or persist.

Ways to Help Children Cope

- Provide only developmentally appropriate information to children.
- Be honest, but do not vent your frustrations/overwhelm the child.
- Provide children with opportunities to talk about what they are seeing on television and to ask questions.
- Don't be afraid to admit that you can't answer all their questions.
- Answer questions at a level the child can understand.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for children to talk. They will probably have more questions as time goes on.
- Establish a family emergency plan. Feeling that there is something you can do may be very comforting to both children and adults.
- Allow children to discuss other fears and concerns about unrelated issues. This is a good opportunity to explore these issues.
- Monitor children's television viewing. Limit your child's exposure to graphic or troubling scenes. To the extent possible, watch TV news reports with children.
- Help children understand there are no bad emotions and that a wide range of reactions is normal. Encourage children to express their feelings to adults who can help them understand their sometimes strong and troubling emotions.
- In addition to the tragic things they are seeing or hearing, help children identify good things such as heroic actions and the assistance offered by people throughout the country and the world.
- Provide children an opportunity to play and have fun. This is a healthy outlet for children coping with stress.
- To the degree possible while maintaining honesty, reassure children that you will be with them and it will be all right.
- If warning signs are serious or persist, seek assistance from a counselor or other behavioral health professional.

**SAMPLE NEWSLETTERS
AND
INFORMATON SHEETS FOR PARENTS**

Sample Newsletter #1: Initial influenza outbreak

Use this newsletter to let parents know schools are open.

This newsletter contains information about the flu outbreak in our community. Every year, some people get sick with the flu during the fall and winter months. This year, there is a new flu virus that is making many people in our community sick. So many people are sick in the world that health officials call it an “influenza pandemic.”

We are working closely with our local health department to determine how our schools can best protect the health and safety of our students and staff. At this time, schools will remain open. We will keep you updated with any important information.

To keep the flu from spreading to more people, we ask you to keep sick children home. Any children who are sick in school will be sent home.

Public health officials want you to protect yourself and your family against influenza. Here are some ways to stop the spread of germs and sickness:

- Keep children who are sick at home.
- Teach your children to wash hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds. Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself. You may also use alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 60 percent alcohol) to clean your hands.
- Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into their elbow or upper sleeve. Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself. Throw the tissues away immediately after use.
- Teach your children to stay at least six feet away from people who are sick.
- People who are sick should stay home from work or school and stay away from other people until they are better.
- You may consider limiting time spent at shopping malls, movie theaters or other places where there are large groups of people.

We are including the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) *Pandemic Flu Planning Checklist for Individuals and Families* for your use.

Pandemic Flu Planning Checklist for Individuals and Families

You can prepare for an influenza pandemic now. You should know both the magnitude of what can happen during a pandemic outbreak and what actions you can take to help lessen the impact of an influenza pandemic on you and your family. This checklist will help you gather the information and resources you may need in case of a flu pandemic.

1. To plan for a pandemic:
 - Store a two-week supply of water and food. During a pandemic, it will be important for you to have extra supplies on hand if you cannot get to a store, or if stores are out of supplies. Stockpiles can be useful in other types of emergencies, such as power outages and disasters.
 - Periodically check your regular prescription drugs to ensure a continuous supply in your home.
 - Have any nonprescription drugs and other health supplies on hand, including pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough and cold medicines, fluids with electrolytes and vitamins.
 - Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would be cared for if they got sick, or what will be needed to care for them in your home.
 - Volunteer with local groups to prepare and assist with emergency response.
 - Get involved in your community as it works to prepare for an influenza pandemic.
2. To limit the spread of germs and prevent infection:
 - Teach your children to wash hands frequently with soap and water, and model the correct behavior.
 - Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues, and be sure to model that behavior.
 - Teach your children to stay away from others as much as possible if they are sick. Stay home from work and school if sick.
3. Items to have on hand for an extended stay at home:

Examples of food and non-perishables	Examples of medical, health, and emergency supplies
○ Ready-to-eat canned meats, fish, fruits, vegetables, beans, and soups	○ Prescribed medical supplies such as glucose and blood-pressure monitoring equipment
○ Protein or fruit bars	○ Soap and water, or alcohol-based (60-95 percent) hand sanitizer
○ Dry cereal or granola	○ Medicines for fever, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen
○ Peanut butter or nuts	○ Thermometer
○ Dried fruit	○ Anti-diarrheal medication
○ Crackers	○ Vitamins
○ Canned juices	○ Fluids with electrolytes

○ Bottled water	○ Cleansing agent/soap
○ Canned or jarred baby food and formula	○ Flashlight
○ Pet food	○ Batteries
○ Other non-perishable items	○ Portable radio
	○ Manual can opener
	○ Garbage bags
	○ Tissues, toilet paper, disposable diapers

For more information

- Visit: <http://pandemicflu.gov/> or <http://ohiopandemicflu.gov/>
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) hotline, 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636), is available in English and Spanish, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. TTY: 1-888-232-6348. Questions can be e-mailed to cdcinfo@cdc.gov.
- Links to state departments of public health can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/other.htm#states>.
- The Ohio hotline number is: 1-866-800-1404

Source: <http://pandemicflu.gov/plan/individual/checklist.html>

Sample Newsletter #2: Expanded outbreak

Use this newsletter to let parents know schools are open and urge ill children to stay home.

You received a recent newsletter to tell you about an influenza outbreak in our county. Here is some new information. We will continue to work with _____ health department to determine if and when our schools should close. As of the printing of this newsletter, schools remain open. We will keep you updated with any important information.

Public health officials want you to protect yourself and your family against influenza. Here are some ways to stop the spread of germs and protect your family:

- Keep children who are sick at home.
- If some of the people in your home are sick with the flu, keep them away from the people who are not sick.
- If some of the people in your home are sick with the flu and you cannot see a health care provider, some things you can do to help them are:
 - Have them drink a lot of liquids (juice, water).
 - Keep the ill person as comfortable as possible. Rest is important.
 - For fever, sore throat and muscle aches, use ibuprofen (Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) as indicated on the label or by a health care provider. Do not use aspirin with children or teenagers; it can cause Reye's syndrome, a life-threatening illness.
 - Keep tissues and a trash bag within reach of the sick person.
 - Be sure everyone in your home washes their hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 60 percent alcohol).
 - Contact a health care provider for further advice. If the ill person is having difficulty breathing or is getting worse, contact the health care provider right away.

If the influenza outbreak continues to spread and more people become ill, schools may close for days or weeks. The purpose of closing schools is to slow or stop the spread of disease. **If schools are closed, children should stay home.** We have enclosed *Coping with the Flu Outbreak: Tips for Parents* to help you continue planning for the needs of your family.

Coping with the Flu Outbreak: Tips for Parents

Plan to stay at home for an extended time during an influenza outbreak.

- Ask your employer about how business will continue during an influenza outbreak.
- Ask your employer if you can work from home during an influenza outbreak.
- Plan for a possible reduction or loss of income if you are unable to work or your place of employment is closed.
- Check with your employer or union about leave policies.
- Plan home learning activities and exercises. Have materials such as books on hand.
- Plan recreational activities your children can do at home.

Suggested items to have on hand for an extended stay at home:

Non-perishable foods

- ~Ready-to-eat canned meats
fruits, vegetables, soups
- ~Protein or fruit bars
- ~Dry cereal or granola
- ~Peanut butter and jelly
- ~Dried fruit, nuts, trail mix
- ~Crackers
- ~Canned juices
- ~Bottled water
- ~Canned or jarred baby food
- ~Baby formula
- ~Pet food

Health and emergency supplies

- ~Prescribed medical supplies such as
glucose and blood pressure monitoring equipment
- ~Soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- ~Medicines for fever such as acetaminophen
(Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin)
- ~Thermometer
- ~Vitamins
- ~Fluids with electrolytes such as Pedialyte® or sport drinks
- ~Flashlight with extra batteries
- ~Portable radio with extra batteries
- ~Manual can opener
- ~Tissues, toilet paper, disposable diapers, sanitary napkins
- ~Garbage bags

If someone in your home develops flu symptoms (fever, cough, muscle aches):

- Encourage them to drink plenty of fluids.
- Keep the ill person as comfortable as possible. Rest is important.
- For individuals with fever, sore throat and muscle aches, use ibuprofen (Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) as indicated on the label or by a health care provider.
- Do not use aspirin in children or teenagers: it can cause Reye's syndrome, a life-threatening illness.
- Sponging with lukewarm (wrist-temperature) water lowers fever only during the period of sponging. Do not sponge with alcohol or ice water.
- Keep tissues and a trash bag for their disposal within reach of the patient.
- All members of the household should wash their hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60 percent alcohol).
- Keep other family members and visitors away from the person who is ill.

Remember to contact a health care provider for advice. If the ill person is having difficulty breathing or is getting worse, contact the health care provider immediately.

For more information, contact your health care provider.

Sample Newsletter #3: School closure

Use this newsletter to inform parents schools are closed.

We have been working closely with our local health officials and at this time we have decided to close our schools because of an influenza outbreak. Our school is immediately closed until further notice and **children should stay home**.

Our school may be closed for days or weeks to reduce the contact among children and stop the spread of the flu.

Because the flu is easily spread from person to person, it is not safe for large groups of people to gather. During this time, both children and adults should stay away from other people and groups as much as possible. They should not gather in other locations such as shopping malls, movie theaters or community centers.

We know it may be hard to get a doctor's appointment, go to a clinic or even be seen in a hospital emergency room. Here are some tips for helping those who are sick with the flu:

- Have them drink a lot of liquids (juice, water).
- Keep the ill person as comfortable as possible. Rest is important.
- For fever, sore throat and muscle aches, use ibuprofen (Motrin®) or acetaminophen (Tylenol®) as indicated on the label or by a health care provider. Do not use aspirin with children or teenagers; it can cause Reye's syndrome, a life-threatening illness.
- Keep tissues and a trash bag within reach of the sick person.
- Be sure everyone in your home washes their hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60 percent alcohol).
- Keep the people who are sick with the flu away from the people who are not sick.

For more information, call your health care provider.

We will contact you as soon as we have information about when school will reopen.

Sample Newsletter #4: School re-opens

Use this newsletter to inform parents schools are re-opened.

Local health officials have declared the influenza outbreak is under control. Our school will open again on _____. At this time, students may safely return to class.

Even though school is opening, there are still some people who are sick from the flu virus. Health officials say influenza outbreaks sometimes happen in waves. This means more people could become sick again. If more people get sick, our school may need to close again. We will continue to give you any important information.

Because the flu can still be spread from person to person, please keep children who are sick at home. Please do not send them to school.

We are looking forward to seeing your children again.

**SAMPLE NEWS RELEASES
AND
SAMPLE STATEMENTS FOR SCHOOL OFFICIALS**

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASES

A-School Open

Schools may choose to use this type of new release to announce schools will remain open.

For release: (date)

Contact: (contact name and number)

Parents urged to plan for possible school closures

(School District Name) urges parents to prepare for possible school closures as influenza continues to spread.

At this time, we are open and our thoughts are with those who have been affected by influenza. It is important for parents to begin planning now for child care in their homes in the event we close our school.

School and health officials are working together and will update parents with important information as it becomes available.

If influenza continues to spread and more Ohioans become ill, health officials say they may need to order schools closed for a period of time.

There are steps residents can take to protect themselves and their loved ones against all respiratory illnesses, including influenza.

- Wash your hand thoroughly and often using soap and warm water, rubbing your hands together for at least 20 seconds. If you are not near soap and water, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 60 percent alcohol), and rub hands until dry.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow, upper sleeve or a tissue. Throw the tissue away after you use it.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth; germs often spread this way.
- Stay away as much as you can from people who are sick.
- If you get sick, stay home from work, school and day care.
- Take care of your overall health by getting enough rest, eating plenty of fruits and vegetable and getting 30 or more minutes of physical activity most days of the week.

Health officials point out recommendations may change during the course of a flu outbreak. For school updates, parent can call the school district's information line at (insert number).

For more information, visit <http://www.cdc.gov>

SAMPLE STATEMENTS FOR SCHOOL OFFICIALS

A-Schools open

Outbreak in Ohio

- We urge parents to plan now for the possibility of schools closing. Arrange for alternate child care at home and home schooling if possible.
- We know this is an anxious time for our community and our hearts go out to those who are sick. We are working closely with local health officials and will keep parents updated.
- In the absence of a vaccine or antiviral medicine, there are some simple actions you can take to stay healthy and help prevent spread of the virus.
 - Teach your children to wash hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds. Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself. You may also use alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 60 percent alcohol) if you are not near soap and water.
 - Teach your children to cough and sneeze into elbows or upper sleeves. If you cough or sneeze into a tissue, throw the tissue away after use.
 - Teach your children to stay away from people who are sick; keep them home if they are sick. Stay home from work if you are sick, too.
 - Maintain a healthy lifestyle every day. Eat lots of fruits and vegetables. Exercise regularly. Drink plenty of fluids and get a good night's sleep. These actions can help boost your immune system and quicken recovery.
- If influenza continues to spread and more Ohioans become sick, health officials may need to close schools for a period of time.
- The purpose of closing schools will be to decrease contact among children in order to lessen their risk of getting sick and to limit the spread of infection. If schools are closed, children should stay at home.
- Because flu is spread easily from person to person, it is recommended that you avoid large gatherings of people if possible.
- If you do not have an emergency supply of food, water and medicines, consider creating a stockpile to last your family for at least one week stay at home. This stockpile could save you trips to the stores and locations where you might be exposed to the flu virus.
- Recommendations may change during the course of a flu outbreak. We will make public announcements through the media, and parents can call the school district's information line at (INSERT NUMBER).
- For more information on the flu outbreak and prevention, visit <http://www.cdc.gov>

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASES

B-School Closure

Schools may choose to use this type of news release to announce closure of schools by health officials or school districts.

For release (Date)

Contact: (contact name and number)

COUNTY/STATE/SCHOOL orders closure of school in LOCATION

COUNTY/STATE health officials/SCHOOL DISTRICT officials have ordered the closure of SCHOOL/SCHOOL DISTRICT as a result of the flu outbreak in the area.

School will be closed UNTIL DATE/FURTHER NOTICE. Because flu viruses are easily spread from person to person, COUNTY/STATE OFFICIALS have also ordered colleges, day care centers and preschools to close. Health officials further caution people against attending large gatherings.

“We know this is an anxious time for our community and our hearts go out to those who are ill. We are working closely with schools to deal with the situation and will keep parents updated with information as it becomes available,” said LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIAL.

Closing school can help limit contact among children and may decrease their risk of getting sick and spreading infection. It is important that children stay home during this time period.

Because many people are sick with the flu, health officials acknowledge it may be hard to get a doctor’s appointment, go to a clinic or be seen in a hospital emergency room. They provided some tips for residents to care for the sick at home:

- Identify a primary caregiver to minimize threat of infection in the household.
- Have patients drink plenty of fluids such as juice or water.
- Keep the sick person as comfortable as possible. Rest is important. For adults with fever, sore throat and muscle aches, use ibuprofen (Motrin®) or acetaminophen (Tylenol®). ***Do not give aspirin to children or teenagers;*** it can cause Reye’s syndrome, a life-threatening illness.
- Be sure everyone in your home washes their hands frequently.
- Keep people who are sick with the flu away from people who are not sick.
- Watch for symptoms that trigger seeking medical help—high or prolonged fever for more than four to five days, shaking chills or a cough producing a yellow discharge.

More detailed information on care for others at home is available at <http://www.cdc.gov>

SAMPLE STATEMENT FOR SCHOOL OFFICIALS

B-School Closure

Outbreak in REGION

- STATE/COUNTY/SCHOOL officials have ordered the closure of schools as a result of the flu outbreak in the STATE/COUNTY.
- Schools may be closed for an extended period of time (for example, up to six weeks).
- We know this is a difficult time for our community and our hearts go out to those who are sick. We are working closely with health officials and will keep parents updated.
- The purpose of closing schools is to decrease contact among children in order to decrease their risk of getting sick and to limit the spread of infection.
- Because flu is easily spread from person to person, children and adults should stay away from other people and groups as much as possible. Avoid large gatherings of people in locations such as homes, shopping malls, movie theaters or community centers.
- Parents can help protect their children and prevent the spread of influenza as they would colds by taking the following precautions:
 - Teach your children to wash hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds. Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself. You may also use alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 60 percent alcohol) if you are not near soap and water.
 - Teach your children to cough and sneeze into elbows or upper sleeves. If you cough or sneeze into a tissue, throw the tissue away after use.
 - Teach your children to stay away from people who are sick; keep them home if they are sick. Stay home from work if you are sick, too.
 - Maintain a healthy lifestyle every day. Eat lots of fruits and vegetables. Exercise regularly. Drink plenty of fluids and get a good night's sleep. These actions can help boost your immune system and quicken recovery.
- Recommendations may change during the course of a flu outbreak. We will make public announcements through the media and parents can call the school district's information line a (INSERT NUMBER).
- For more information on this influenza outbreak, visit <http://www.cdc.gov>

INFLUENZA INFORMATION

Flu Terms Defined

H1N1 Influenza (H1N1flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen.

Bird flu is commonly used to refer to *Avian flu* (see below). Bird flu viruses infect birds, including chickens, other poultry and wild birds such as ducks.

Avian flu (AI) is caused by influenza viruses that occur naturally among wild birds. Low pathogenic AI is common in birds and causes few problems. Highly pathogenic H5N1 is deadly to domestic fowl, can be transmitted from birds to humans, and is deadly to humans. There is virtually no human immunity and vaccines are not available.

Pandemic flu is virulent human flu that causes a global outbreak, or pandemic of illness. Because there is little natural immunity, the disease can spread easily from person to person. Currently, there is no pandemic flu.

Seasonal flu is a respiratory illness that can be transmitted person to person. Most people have some immunity, and a vaccine is available.

From: <http://pandemicflu.gov/popup.html>

The Use of Alcohol-based Hand Sanitizers in Ohio Schools

Summary: Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be effective when used for hand hygiene. They may be safely and effectively used in the school setting if guidelines are followed.

Background: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends hand washing to reduce infection transmission. Effective hand washing can be done with either soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Because of the widely recognized benefits of hand hygiene, Jarrod's Law (Ohio Administrative Code [OAC] 3701-54-09) requires all schools to develop and implement a written protocol for hand washing in each school. Such a protocol may require the use of soap and water and/or alcohol-based hand sanitizers.

Purpose: In general, if hands are visibly soiled, soap and water should be used for hand hygiene. In other circumstances, the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be as effective as soap and water. In the case of younger students who may not thoroughly wash, rinse and dry hands, the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers may be more effective than and preferable to the use of soap and water when hands are not visibly soiled. In addition, the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers can allow a large number of students and staff to cleanse their hands in a time-efficient manner. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers must be at least 60 percent alcohol to be effective; the use of other types of cleansers is not recommended. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not effective in removing nut allergens from surfaces. It is recommended that unscented products be used in the school setting, as scented products may trigger asthma or allergy symptoms.

Guidelines for Use: Hand hygiene with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer should be done frequently, and especially at the following times:

Before:

- Preparing food or eating
- Inserting or removing contact lenses
- Rendering first aid or treating a person who is ill
- Administering medication or completing a medical procedure

After:

- Any contact with blood, body fluids or soiled objects
- Using the toilet
- Assisting with personal hygiene, such as changing diapers
- Touching animals or animal waste
- Food preparation, especially after handling raw meat, poultry or fish
- Blowing your nose, using a tissue or coughing or sneezing into your hands
- Treating or touching open wounds or a person who is sick or injured
- After handling trash or garbage
- After playing outdoors

In Ohio schools, all students and staff should receive instruction on the appropriate and effective use of hand sanitizers. The following recommendations are for best practice in the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers in Ohio schools.

1. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers should be located in places where students are supervised by school staff at all times
2. Do not allow students or staff to ingest alcohol-based hand sanitizers
3. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are flammable-do not use while smoking or near open flame
4. It is recommended that the school purchase alcohol-based hand sanitizers for use in each classroom and cafeteria, just as it purchases soap and towels for restrooms and kitchens. The advantages for such a school purchase include:

- a. The school will have a material safety data sheet (MSDS) for all alcohol-based hand sanitizers in the building
 - b. Refills for the alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be stored with cleaning supplies away from heat sources or open flames and in accordance with Ohio Fire Code regulations (OAC 1301:7-7-3405.5)
5. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers must be located so they do not drip liquid on the floor to create a fall hazard. A “drip catcher” may be placed on the dispenser to prevent this.

Instructions for Placement and Storage: The placement of the alcohol-based hand sanitizers, if wall mounted, should be consistent from room to room and in compliance with the Ohio Fire Code regulations (OAC 1301:7-7-3405.5) summarized here. Dispensers must:

- Have a maximum capacity of 68 ounces
- Be a minimum of 48 inches apart
- Be installed in locations that are not above, below or directly adjacent to electrical outlets, switches, appliances, devices or any other potential ignition source
- Be placed between 42 and 48 inches from the floor
- Be manually activated
- Be properly supplied with sprinkler systems if placed in carpeted areas

In addition, alcohol-based hand sanitizers in school hallways or corridors must comply with Ohio Fire Code regulations (OAC 1301:7-7-3405.5) summarized here:

- There can be no aerosol containers in the hallway
- Dispensers can have a maximum capacity of 41 ounces
- There can be no more than 10 gallons in the hallway
- The hallway must be a minimum of 72 inches in width
- There can be no unapproved projections into the hallway

References:

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- CDC. (2008.) *Clean Hands Save Lives!* Available online: <http://www.cdc.gov/cleanhands/>
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- Mayo Clinic. (2008). *Hand washing: An easy way to prevent infection*. Available online: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/hand-washing/HQ00407>.
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RESOURCES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This Web site is frequently updated with the most current information about the influenza outbreak. The link on the front page now says H1N1 Flu. <http://www.cdc.gov>

Ohio Department of Health. This Web site has information about the H1N1 (Swine flu) outbreak in Ohio and includes links to the CDC and WHO Web sites. <http://www.odh.ohio.gov>

Ohio Pandemic flu. This Web site is being updated to provide information about the H1N1 influenza outbreak in Ohio. <http://ohiopandemicflu.gov>

Pandemicflu.gov. This federal Web site has a rich assortment of resources for schools, communities and families. Documents are available in a number of languages. See especially School Planning, which also includes information about planning for child care providers. <http://pandemicflu.gov>

Pandemic flu: a planning guide for educators.

<http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/pandemic/planning-guide/planning-guide.pdf>