



School Guidelines for Managing an Influenza Outbreak

BACKGROUND

Influenza refers to illnesses caused by a number of different viruses that can cause a range of symptoms and effects from mild to critical. This year, the H1N1(swine) flu virus may cause a more severe flu season with many more people than usual becoming infected, especially with families traveling globally by air. The World Health Organisation (WHO) constantly monitors the various flu-type viruses that occur during each year and has warned that a flu pandemic will arrive in phases.

H1N1 Influenza is a highly contagious viral disease of the respiratory tract. It is more commonly known as the human form of swine flu. The influenza is spread when a person comes into contact with the respiratory droplets of another person by touching items on which droplets are present, and then touching their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands. The infection then enters the lungs where it starts to multiply. The disease damages the lining of the respiratory tract, and secondary infection can cause pneumonia, meningitis and ear infections. Most healthy people recover from flu without problems, but certain people are at high risk and do not have natural immunity to the virus. Therefore, they are susceptible to influenza infections and can become seriously ill very quickly.

There are some specific issues to consider concerning children as they tend to spread larger amounts of the virus and for longer periods than adults. This can lead to the rapid spread of infection when they are all together in school. There are children at Cedar with medical conditions that can be compromised by an outbreak of the H1N1 influenza. Those pupils and staff deemed at high risk due to pre-existing conditions should be advised to stay at home for all or part of any pandemic. Although it is not considered feasible to halt the spread of an influenza virus, it should be possible to minimize its consequences through advance preparation

The aim of the school is to provide children and staff with a healthy, safe, infection-free environment.

PLANNING

The Director of the school and heads of departments will endeavor to continue operating as normally as possible during a pandemic. The decision to shut the school for a period of time will be made depending on the consequences and severity of the impact of the pandemic on the school, including but not limited to student and staff absence levels. The decision to close the school will be made by the Director of the school and the Chair of the Board of Trustees in

consultation with a pandemic management team and on the advice of the Department of Health and Education.

If the school is closed to students, the administration will keep parents and staff updated on the current situation and will provide support and advice by making learning resources available. The school will ensure that contact information for parents and staff is electronically stored and readily available for authorized users.

INFECTION CONTROL

General

The school will undertake the following measures to minimize potential influenza transmission:

- Ensure sick people are kept away from others within the school until they can go home or be collected.
- Send (per school nurse's advice) any child or staff member home if they display symptoms or become unwell with a fever during school hours. Students, faculty and staff should not come to school if they have flu-like symptoms that may include one or more of the following.
 - Sudden onset of fever
 - Headache
 - Muscle pains
 - Feeling ill
 - Sore throat
 - Cough or difficulty in breathing
 - Vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Encourage vaccination when available and appropriate. A vaccine closely matching the H1N1 virus should be available from medical centres in the BVI in early 2010.
- Ensure hand washing and sanitizing facilities are available in designated areas around the school. All classrooms are to have hand sanitizer and tissues in view and ready for use.
- Encourage children/staff to keep hydrated with water available around the school and to keep personal water bottles clean and away from the sun.
- Provide regular education reminders within the classrooms and on notice board regarding hand hygiene cough/sneeze etiquette, etc.
- Provide regular updates on current information on the notice boards around the school, including information from the Department of Health and Education.
- In the event of an outbreak of the H1N1 virus in the school community and/or in the BVI, discourage prolonged gathering of students in the hallways, dining areas and other areas where students may normally congregate and make every effort to provide adequate spacing between desks in the classrooms.

- As required, complete the 'Illness Case Register' for students and staff presented with influenza symptoms and send to the Ministry of Health with a copy kept in the files of the school nurse.

Hygiene

The school will encourage all community members to minimize potential influenza transmission through the good hygiene measures listed below:

- Washing hands throughout the day to stop the spread of infection from hands to other people.
- Covering the nose and mouth with single-use disposable tissues when sneezing, coughing, wiping and blowing noses.
- Disposing of used tissues in the nearest waste bin.
- Keeping hands away from the mucus membranes of the eyes and nose.

Cleaning and Waste Disposal

The school Office Manager in charge of the cleaning staff will adopt the following measures to improve general hygiene:

- Cleaning staff will wear gloves for use in cleaning duties.
- All hard surfaces in the class rooms, computers, telephones, door handles, toilet seats and handles will be cleaned with an anti-viral solution.
- The cleaners will ensure that waste bins containing sealable plastic bags are deployed around the school for the collection of used paper tissues. They are to be emptied on a daily basis and disposed of in sealed plastic bags.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to determine in advance the likely consequences for the school of a major pandemic. The school should continue to function unless instructed to close or unless conditions at the school or in the local community make it unsafe. Flexibility is required by all staff, with the emphasis at all levels being given to minimizing the risk through good and responsible personal and general hygiene.

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Sources:

- Department of Education Pandemic Influenza plan BVI 2009
- www.bvddm.com
- www.cdc.gov
- www.Who.org