

**From:** Kansas City, Missouri Health Department  
**KCHD HAN Number:** KC 007-09  
**Date:** 04/30/2009  
**Subject:** H1N1 (Swine) Influenza Information for Schools



## **H1N1 (Swine) Influenza: What Schools Need To Know**

### **What is swine influenza?**

Swine influenza is a respiratory infection among pigs and, occasionally people, caused by influenza viruses that regularly cause outbreaks in pigs. The current influenza situation in Mexico, the United States, and other countries is not swine flu per se (although called that), but rather an influenza virus transmitting person-to-person that has genetic components of swine flu viruses. This virus is designated as a H1N1 influenza virus. It is not being transmitted to people from pigs or pig products. There have been reports of serious illness and deaths due to this virus in Mexico, but the recently confirmed cases in the United States have been mild.

### **What are the symptoms of H1N1 influenza?**

H1N1 flu symptoms appear to be similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, lethargy, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with H1N1 flu.

### **How does H1N1 influenza spread?**

Swine flu viruses can be directly transmitted between pigs and people. Human-to-human transmission is also possible, and appears to be occurring with this outbreak. Influenza is spread mainly through coughing or sneezing. People may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

### **Who is at risk for H1N1 influenza?**

Anyone who has contact with an infected person may be exposed to H1N1 flu. Human transmission is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu: through aerosolized particles that are released when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

### **How can I protect myself and my students from H1N1 influenza?**

Here are the best ways to avoid getting or spreading H1N1 influenza:

- Encourage all people to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or their sleeve when they cough or sneeze
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze
- Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people
- If you get sick, limit contact with others to avoid infecting them

These are the same protections as those for seasonal flu and many other respiratory infections.

### **What should I do if one of my students has flu-like symptoms while at school?**

If a child is experiencing an influenza-like illness (ILI), a fever of  $\geq 100^{\circ}$  F or  $38^{\circ}$  C and a cough or sore throat in absence of a known cause, the child should be taken to an isolated area or room away from other people to wait while a parent or guardian is called to pick up the child from school. If the child is coughing and/or sneezing, the child should be instructed

to cover his/her nose and mouth with a tissue and it should be thrown away when done. If face masks are available, a mask should be placed on the child. The child should immediately wash his/her hands or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer after touching his/her mouth or nose.

### **When can I allow a sick child to return to school?**

Remind parents and enforce policies for having ill children stay at home during their illness. Children with symptoms of ILI should not come to school. The child's health care provider will determine whether influenza testing is needed and when the child can return to school. If a child has been confirmed to have H1N1 influenza, seek the advice of the child's health care provider and the local health department in your area about when the child can return. Remind teachers and other school staff that they should not come to work either if they are experiencing ILI symptoms.

### **What are the signs of more severe illness with H1N1 flu?**

While the current H1N1 influenza cases have been mild so far, infected individuals should still be aware of some of the more severe illness with H1N1 flu. If you or a student become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care.

In children emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, symptoms that need emergency medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

### **How can we help prevent transmission of H1N1 flu in our school?**

- Remind students and staff to frequently wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand cleaners, and make sure that hand washing supplies are available to prevent the spread of germs.
- Keep the school environment clean and make sure that cleaning supplies are available. Frequently clean touched surfaces and commonly shared items. All hard surfaces, such as doorknobs, desks, tables, chairs, and bathroom surfaces, should be washed with soap or detergent, rinsed with water and then disinfected and rinsed. Disinfectants are those with "registered disinfectant" on the label. If disinfectants are not available, use a chlorine bleach solution made by adding 1 tablespoon of bleach to a quart (4 cups) of water. Use a cloth to apply this to surfaces and then rinse them with water. Dispose of the used bleach solution and mix a fresh solution when repeating the cleaning process. Use sanitizer cloths to wipe electronic items or other equipment (phones, computers, toys) that are touched often.

- Remind students and staff to cover their noses and mouths when sneezing or coughing.
- All students should be monitored for ILI symptoms and sent home if symptoms develop while at school. Ill students or staff should stay at home and not return to school until all symptoms resolve or they are released by their medical provider. A confirmed case of H1N1 influenza should not be allowed to return to school until cleared by either the physician or local public health department. An increase in cases of respiratory illness or ILI in the school should be immediately reported to your local public health department.

### **Should we close our school?**

Dismissal of students should be strongly considered in schools with a confirmed or a suspected case that is directly linked to a confirmed case. Consultation with your local health department is encouraged. Decisions regarding broader school dismissal within these communities will need to be made between the affected school district and the local public health department while taking into account the extent of ILI in the community.

If your school dismisses students, you should also cancel all school or childcare related gatherings and encourage parents and students to avoid congregating outside of the school. The length of time for the school closure will be evaluated on an ongoing basis depending on a number of factors. Schools and childcare facilities should consult with their local or state health departments for guidance on reopening. If no additional confirmed or suspected cases are identified among students (or school-based personnel) for a period of 7 days, schools may consider reopening.

Schools and childcare facilities in unaffected areas should begin to prepare for the possibility of school dismissal or childcare facility closure. This includes asking teachers, parents and officials in charge of critical school-associated programs (such as meal services) to make contingency plans.

These recommendations are subject to change as additional epidemiological and clinical data become available.

**All known or suspected cases of H1N1 (Swine) Influenza should be immediately reported to the Kansas City, MO Health Department (816-513-6152) or to the Local Public Health Department in your jurisdiction.**

Current information on H1N1 flu influenza is available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu>