



Considerations for Coping with H1n1 in a School Setting

Preparing Students:

- Make lessons about hygiene brief and clear but also on a consistent schedule, for example every Monday morning during the regular time set aside for other announcements.
- Be sure to have adequate supplies such as the recommended hand washing materials and tissues available. Put up posters reminding children of hand washing and “right” ways for sneezing/coughing. Teach the “Dracula” sneeze technique which has us sneeze into our elbow/sleeve area, covering your face as opposed to covering with your hands.
- For younger children use age appropriate terms such as “flu germ.”
- Do as much planning as possible **before** the children return to the classroom. Move desks apart and start the school year with social distancing in mind at the onset rather than changing a classroom set up or routine after students begin to become ill.
- If group learning stations are still needed, reduce the number of children at each station – increasing personal space.
- Have the school nurse and health teachers talk about prevention and safety planning that might include discussion about the changes the kids might see as a preventative strategy to keep them and others safe.
- Get kids involved in classroom chores daily. Build in “cleaning” rituals that are practiced throughout the day. For example, children are to use bathrooms and wash hands upon arrival. Desks are to be wiped down before and after lunch and before dismissal. Keyboards and other things frequently touched by the classroom children should be wiped down frequently, after each use if possible (by staff and/or students).
- Place signs on entranceways asking students/staff to report immediately to the nurse before going to the classroom if they do not feel well.
- Early in the year – before any problems arise, have the school nurse come to each class to talk about hand washing and to “show and tell” about

equipment that may be used if kids are sick at school demonstrating masks, protective equipment such as gloves and thermometers. Talk about the space that will be used for sick children and how they will be taken care of and how their families will be contacted. For younger children – the use of puppets may make the information more compelling and less threatening.

- Faculty and staff should adopt an open and accepting attitude towards people who choose to wear masks, commenting that it is a personal choice and is fine if it makes someone feel more comfortable. It does not mean that someone is sick. Used masks should be placed immediately in the trash upon removal and should not be touched by anyone.
- Be sure to build in time for kids to relax and play throughout the day. Stress reduction, play and exercise are important ways to reduce stress which may compromise immune systems.
- Help kids develop optimism. Mastery is an important way to boost resilience and immunity. It keeps morale up and keeps students more available for learning if they are not preoccupied with potential dangers or fears.
- Acknowledge in simple ways when a student/teacher are absent from the class. Simple statements such as someone is not feeling well and will be out today or out for a few days is helpful in reducing concern. While it is important to respect privacy issues, students who sense there are secrets or dangers may become unnecessarily concerned if basic communication about absences is not shared. Children often create more troubling scenarios when not provided basic facts.
- Remember... stick with the routines of the day. Normalize the new prevention practices as a way to keep everyone safe and healthy. Don't just clean up after a sick person, clean up after everyone.
- Communicate regularly with updates to staff and families in your school community.
- Post hand washing stickers in bathrooms. New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS) developed waterproof stickers in both English and Spanish, to promote proper hand washing. To access stickers, contact a LINCS Health Educator/Risk Communication Specialist (HERC). For information about how to find local health educators go to:

- <http://nj.gov/health/lh/documents/njlincsdirectory.pdf>
- <http://nj.gov/health/lh/directory/lhdselectcounty.shtml>

Preparing Administrators and Teachers:

- These guidelines should be shared with School District Administrators, Principals, Teachers, Teachers Aides, School Nurses and other school staff.
- In sharing information, it may be helpful to have a representative from the local health department at meetings, along with a mental health professional who can address the need to remain calm and clear-headed. For information about how to find mental health services go to: <http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dmhs/home/> or call 1-877-294-HELP (4357) or TTY (4356).
- LINCS HERCs have a community influenza program that educates about the difference between seasonal and pandemic influenza and what people can do to protect themselves. HERCs may also be available for “back-to-school” presentations!
- Once school staff has been prepared, key personnel should be chosen who have good communication skills and are clear and confident in their ability to disseminate information to parents. It is not recommended that teachers or administrators who may be struggling or overwhelmed with the content of the material present it to families.
- Faculty or staff who are high risk due to age, concurrent health issues and/or pregnancy should seek opportunities for individual consultation from their personal physicians to help process the information and consider its relevance in their safety and emergency planning.
- Once all school personnel have been briefed, the task of preparing students and preparing for students’ needs begins. Make sure there is sufficient money allotted in the school budget for supplies to purchase tissues, hand sanitizers, disinfecting wipes/cleansers, personal protective supplies (masks, gloves)
- Districts should have counseling staff available on a regular basis to address concerns and reactions that may arise on the part of faculty and staff, parents and youth.
- Plan to meet with parents to discuss the school’s plan if the flu becomes a problem in your community. Remember to form a good collaborative relationship with your local health department and follow their recommendations for managing the flu. Meeting with your local mental health center in advance is a good idea.

- Time needs to be given to faculty to develop alternate plans for packaging lessons and assignments if students are out sick or if school is closed. Provide time for teachers to be available by phone or email during the day.

In the event that a serious case or cases of H1N1 should occur or in the event of loss of life, the New Jersey Division of Mental Health Services Disaster Crisis Counseling response program (1-877-294- HELP (4357) OR TTY 4356) might be contacted to deal with specific children, classrooms or schools