



2009 H1N1 (Swine Flu) Information for Educators May 4, 2009

CLOSING SCHOOLS

1. Q. Who can close schools?

A. The decision to close schools rests in the first instance with the local board of education/superintendent of schools in consultation with local health authorities.

Schools will be required to follow requests of the local health department and county emergency managers and any emergency declarations that are issued by the Governor.

The Commissioner of Education also has the authority to close schools under extraordinary circumstances where local school officials do not take action deemed appropriate by State and/or county emergency personnel in accordance with county or State emergency preparedness plans or directives.

2. Q. How would nonpublic and private schools be affected by decisions to close?

A. Nonpublic schools are subject to any declaration by the Governor or request to close by health departments and local emergency managers.

STATE AID

3. Q. What is the State Aid impact on a school that closes and does not meet the requirement of 180 days of instruction?

A. The statute is very specific. It authorizes the Commissioner of Education to excuse up to five days from the 180 day requirement only where there have been extraordinarily adverse weather conditions, an impairment of heating facilities, an insufficient water supply, a fuel shortage, a lack of electricity, a natural gas leak, unacceptable levels of chemical substances, or the destruction of a school building. So the Commissioner of Education is not legally authorized to grant an excusal in this situation and a district could lose 1/180th of its Foundation Aid for each day below 180 days of instruction.

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Should the flu's impact become greater than anticipated, the Department will ask the Legislature to amend the law to give the Commissioner of Education the authority to excuse missed days as a result of a health department recommended dismissal.

SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES

4. Q. What should the school nurse do if he/she identifies a student with flu-like symptoms?

A. According to New York State Department of Health (DOH) guidance a student should be clinically evaluated for flu if they present with the symptoms of acute febrile respiratory illness which includes a temperature of 100.0F (37.8C) and recent onset of at least one of the following:

- Rhinorrhea (runny nose) or nasal congestion
- sore throat
- cough

Upon identification, the student should be kept a minimum of 6 feet away from others and should be provided with a mask to help prevent possible transmission of the virus to others while waiting for clinical evaluation. The parent/guardian should be asked to pick up the student from school.

5. Q. Is there specific guidance a school nurse should follow regarding individual student dismissal?

A. The school nurse should follow district procedures and protocols. Generally, a school nurse should alert the school administrator who would contact the parent/guardian to determine if alternate arrangements can be made. If the school is unsuccessful in getting the student sent home they should contact the local department of health.

6. Q. Where can school nurses get reliable, up-to-date information relevant to health care workers?

A. Nurses should consult with the school district's medical director and their county department of health. Nurses should also refer to the following web sites for up-to-date guidance and information:

- https://commerce.health.state.ny.us/hpn/ctrldocs/alrtview/postings/doc090430_2.pdf
- www.cdc.gov/swineflu

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- www.schoolhealthservices.org

7. **Q. If the local department of health requires reporting the names of students exhibiting flu-like symptoms, can the school release the names?**

A. Yes. On April 26, 2009, the United States Department of Health and Human Services declared a nationwide public health emergency involving 2009 H1N1 (Swine Flu). In an emergency, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) authorizes school officials to disclose without consent education records to appropriate parties in connection with an emergency, if knowledge of that information is necessary to protect the health and safety of the student or other individuals. See 34 CFR Part 99. School officials should contact USED's Family Policy Compliance Office with any questions by calling (202) 260-3887.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

8. **Q. Should schools make any changes in their standard procedures regarding environmental controls (e.g., bring more air into the building, increase air circulation)?**

A. Districts should make sure facilities are provided with the fresh air designed for their particular system. They should also make sure that air filters are clean and are not being bypassed in any way.

CHILD NUTRITION AND USDA

9. **Q. Can schools continue to feed children at school through the school meals programs if we close schools?**

A. Handle a school closing for flu as you would for a snowstorm or holiday break. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) cannot reimburse for school meals when schools are not in session and would not implement an alternative program to feed those children unless the closings became prolonged due to a pandemic. For more information, please see the USDA's Web site: www.usda.gov or refer to the SED Office of Child Nutrition at <http://portal.nysed.gov/portal/page/pref/CNKC>.

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COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

10. Q. Will the 2009 H1N1 flu outbreak result in closure of postsecondary institutions and if so, who can close postsecondary institutions and who can reopen them?
- A. The decision to close and reopen a postsecondary institution rests with the College President or Chief Executive Officer who should make any such decisions in close consultation with local and state public health authorities. However, the Governor has the authority to require institutions to close as a result of a pandemic flu under Executive Order. Local county emergency management coordinators, in conjunction with the Department of Health can provide guidance about closures. Postsecondary institutions would operate at their own risk of liability if they choose to remain open during a declared emergency.
11. Q. If the College or University President decides to close the institution temporarily as a result of students becoming infected with H1N1, should we contact the State Education Department and/or the Department of Health?
- A. Yes, the College or University should contact the Department's Office of College and University Evaluation by email to jfrey@mail.nysed.gov or by telephone at (518) 486-3633. The college should also notify its local Health Department of the closure.
12. Q. Should postsecondary institutions modify their emergency plans to reflect pandemic flu planning? If an institution does not have an emergency plan, are there resources available to develop one?
- A. Many colleges and universities emergency plans are multi-hazard. The plans should reflect any natural, technological, and human-made hazards that may potentially impact the institution. If the plan does not include pandemic planning, it should be integrated into the existing emergency plan. It is important that this planning process include a description of preparations for obtaining assistance during the emergency from emergency service organizations, local government, and county agencies. The Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Packet for colleges and universities is available on the State Department of Health's website at: http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/communicable/influenza/pandemic/docs/pandemic_influenza_college_toolkit.pdf
Emergency management planning information is available at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security website at:

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<http://www.dhs.gov/index.shtm>

13. **Q. What information should be provided to students, faculty, and staff in planning for a pandemic flu event, as well as following a pandemic flu event?**

A. In addition to the list of websites referred to above, it will be helpful to provide guidance on individual infection control strategies, including cough etiquette, hand and respiratory hygiene, and social distancing. The criteria and procedures for sending symptomatic students, faculty, and staff home should also be available. Pertinent sections of the institutions emergency plan should be made available to faculty and staff.

14. **Q. What additional steps can colleges and universities take at this time?**

A. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that colleges and universities:

- Review your institution's plans for responding to a public health emergency and make sure they are up to date.
- Know local/state plans for institutions of higher education in the event of a mild or severe disease outbreak. This information may be available from state or local health authorities:

[\(<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/states/index.html>\)](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/states/index.html).

- Ask your campus health center to develop and implement a system to track and report (to the local health department) influenza-like illness (an illness with at least fever and sore throat or cough) among students.
- Persons with influenza-like-illness should consult their physician and the institution should consult with their local or state health department for recommendations on identifying persons with H1N1 flu and ways to prevent spread of this virus.
- Institutions of higher education should promote [everyday preventive actions for students and staff](#): 1) Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. 2) Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. 3) Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective. 4) Avoid close contact with sick people. 5) Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way. 6) If you get influenza-like-illness

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symptoms, stay home from work or school except to seek medical care and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

- Monitor the postings on the CDC web site and that of your local and state health departments and follow local health department advice about possible closure of colleges and universities
- Contact your local public health department if you have questions or suspected cases.

Institutions of higher education can help protect the health of their staff and their students by calling attention to the every day preventive actions that can be taken to prevent the spread of influenza. (Please consider posting or distributing the everyday actions to prevent the spread of influenza attached with this memo across campus including residential dorms).

Review and implement, if needed, CDC Guidelines and Recommendations for Preventing the Spread of Influenza (the Flu) in a declared pandemic. (See appendix, Pandemic Influenza Community Mitigation Interim Planning Guide for Colleges and Universities, available at:

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/community/commitigation.html>