

August 26, 2009

Dear Administrator:

As we start another school year, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Department of Health Services (DHS) offer the following update on the current H1N1 influenza pandemic, possible impacts this fall, clarification on waivers, and links to additional information.

To date, the symptoms of novel H1N1 flu virus have been similar to those of seasonal flu. National and world public health leaders predict that there could be significant numbers of people who become ill due to H1N1. School-aged children have become ill with H1N1 more frequently than is typical with the seasonal influenza. Because this is a new virus, most people do not have any protection against it, and we have much to learn. It is important to remain vigilant and prepare for rapid changes in the spread and severity of the H1N1 flu.

A vaccine for the H1N1 flu virus is currently being developed and will be tested in late summer. Unfortunately, we cannot predict when the vaccine will become available. If testing of the vaccine proves successful, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has indicated that school-aged children will have priority for vaccination. A vaccination campaign, led by local health departments, but likely involving school personnel and other agencies and volunteers, would likely take place in schools and other locations throughout Wisconsin this fall or winter.

Due to the potential impact of the H1N1 flu, it is important for schools to develop specific plans for flu outbreaks as part of their crisis response plans. We strongly recommend these plans utilize the templates provided by DPI (see below) and be shared for discussion with local health departments, county emergency management, and other relevant community partners. Schools should remain alert for changing guidelines for excluding students with flu-like symptoms and confirmed H1N1 flu. Schools are encouraged to monitor daily rates of absenteeism, especially for influenza-like illness, and notify local health departments if such absenteeism increases several days in a row. Schools should continue to promote hand-washing, cough hygiene, and other measures to reduce disease transmission.

In order to help schools prepare, monitor illness, and respond, we have developed or identified a variety of tools and resources that are available on the DPI pandemic flu webpage, <http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/pandemicflu.html>. Examples include: template letters, a frequently asked questions document, a school pandemic flu plan template, sample school plans, sample school signage, school surveillance guidance, and sample forms. This website also describes training available for school pandemic preparedness. Other resources and materials for families, employers, and child care providers can be found at <http://pandemic.wisconsin.gov>.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently issued guidance for K-12 schools concerning preparation and communication regarding the H1N1 flu. The information can be found at <http://pandemic.wisconsin.gov> and <http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/pandemicflu.html>. Our departments support these guidelines.

The CDC is currently advising that schools will **not** need to close simply because students or staff contract the H1N1 flu. Instead, the CDC advises that schools may be closed if the severity of the H1N1 flu increases significantly compared to the spring of 2009. In the event that a school is closed, certain Wisconsin statutes apply. Under Wis. Stat. sec. 252.02(3), the Department of Health Services, through the state health officer or a local health officer, may close schools and forbid public gatherings in schools, churches, and other places to control outbreaks and epidemics. Following a health department order or school decision to close, schools should do the following:

1. Notify all parents, staff, students, and relevant community partners.
2. Cancel all school-related activities involving children or as consistent with health department orders.
3. Cooperate with the local health department, as appropriate, in other public health measures.
4. Remain alert for updates from the local health department, county emergency management, and the DPI. DPI will post all new flu-related information at <http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/pandemicflu.html> and use email lists to notify school personnel.
5. Notify the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) immediately of school closures. School districts can complete a short form via the web: [www.cdc.gov/FluSchoolDismissal](http://www.cdc.gov/FluSchoolDismissal). CDC will share the information with the states.
6. Districts are required to submit, to the Department of Public Instruction, form PI-H1N1 (<http://dpi.wi.gov/forms/doc/fh1n1.doc>) which includes the school closure by order of the state/local health department letter.

Only days that schools are closed under a health department order count toward the 180-day requirement. Hours of instruction are not waived regardless of who closes a school. If a district falls below the minimum number of hours required (1,050 hours for grades K-6; 1,137 hours for grades 7-12), districts can choose to implement their emergency response plan, make-up the time, or apply for a waiver. DPI uses the following criteria in reviewing waiver requests related to hours of instruction: length of closure, timing of closure in the school year, impact on and provisions for student learning during the period of closure, and whether or not the closure was under health department order. Waiver requests should be submitted electronically to Bev Kniess at [beverly.kniess@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:beverly.kniess@dpi.wi.gov). More information on waivers may be found at <http://dpi.wi.gov/cal/waiver.html>. Districts will be notified of the review results both electronically and in writing.

School districts should have an emergency response plan in place, approved by their school board, which includes a plan to implement alternative procedures to assure continuity of instruction. Please remember that accessibility for all students must be included in the plan. We encourage school districts to consider options to continue education during an extended school closure. Possible methods include mailed assignments, web-based instruction, television, and radio. Additional information is available at [http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/pdf/flu\\_learning.pdf](http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/pdf/flu_learning.pdf).

We appreciate your cooperation and look forward to another successful and healthy school year. If you have any questions, please contact Doug White, Director, Student Services/Prevention and Wellness, DPI, at [douglas.white@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:douglas.white@dpi.wi.gov) or 608-266-5198, or for public health-related questions, [DHSWiPanFlu@wisconsin.gov](mailto:DHSWiPanFlu@wisconsin.gov).

Sincerely,



Tony Evers, PhD  
State Superintendent  
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction



Karen E. Timberlake  
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