

SCHOOL DISTRICT PANDEMIC INFLUENZA PLANNING GUIDELINES

CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL
SUPERINTENDENTS

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Introduction

One of the most important public health issues our Nation and the world faces is the threat of a global disease outbreak called a pandemic. It is therefore important that adequate planning take place before any pandemic occurs.

The ubiquitous nature of an influenza pandemic compels Federal, State and local governments, communities (including schools), corporations, families and individuals to learn about, prevent, prepare for, and collaborate in efforts to slow, respond to, mitigate, and recover from a potential pandemic. The development, refinement, and exercise of pandemic influenza plans by all stakeholders are critical components of preparedness.

HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services - November 2005

Pandemic Influenza Plan

The following white paper has been developed by the CAPSS Education Policies Committee with assistance from Dr. James Hadler, CT Department of Public Health, Dr. Joseph Havlicek, Middletown Director of Health, and Cheryl Resha, RN, Ed.D., Health Promotion Consultant, CT State Department of Education.

All pandemic plans need to be tailored to local circumstances. The purpose of this paper is to present information and ideas that should be considered by school districts and communities as they begin to develop their plans in order to respond to, mitigate, and recover from a possible pandemic.

It is important that any plan address not only the health issues, but also the continuing educational needs and psychological needs of the school children and staff. It should also be noted that U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has pointed out that in an affected community at least two pandemic disease waves lasting between six to eight weeks are likely to occur over six to twelve months.

BEFORE

Things to consider prior to the occurrence of a pandemic:

- Develop a local plan and determine who should be involved.

(i.e. Superintendent, principal, nurse, health director, town/city government, social services department, school food service director, school physician, custodial supervisor, school psychologist, teachers, parents, etc..)

- Develop procedures for communicating with the public.
- Establish Incident Command System with lines of authority.
- Develop information to send home to parents and present in class to students (i.e. your plan, pandemic influenza fundamentals).
- Establish and implement steps school districts can take to minimize an influenza outbreak.
 - cleaning precautions
 - stockpile personal protection supplies, i.e. masks, (high-quality surgical and respirator N95), gloves, alcohol, hygienic soap, etc.
 - personal contact/hygiene
 - nurse's responsibilities
 - Develop and implement protocols for managing students who develop influenza-like illness in school (e.g., put mask on student, isolate until can go home).
 - Consider any special concerns/procedures needed for the special needs population within their schools.
 - Educate and ensure prevention policies are followed.
 - Work with local health departments to develop and implement surveillance systems as outlined below.
 - Provide information and education to staff, students and families regarding pandemic flu, individual prevention measures, and community/school plans.
 - develop and implement infection prevention policies
 - Develop inclusion and exclusion policies regarding communicable diseases spread by respiratory droplets and infectious illnesses for students and staff in conjunction with the school nurses and school medical advisor.
 - Educate families and staff regarding policies, and encourage students and staff to remain at home when ill.
 - Encourage staff and students to practice "respiratory etiquette" when they have mild respiratory symptoms.
- Develop precautions that the food service staff need to take.
 - Ensures that all food service staff follow established school district infection control policies and procedures.
- Develop illness surveillance protocols.

- During a pandemic, the IL Department of Public Health will be monitoring hospital admissions, emergency department visits, deaths and, potentially, school and workplace absenteeism. It will be important for schools to be able to keep track of daily absenteeism among students as a percentage of enrolled students and daily absenteeism among staff as a percentage of all staff. This information may be used to guide school closings and reopenings as well as to monitor the changing impact of the influenza problem.
 - Develop syndromic surveillance systems for school nurses to utilize to monitor reasons for student absenteeism (This is being recommended at the national level to assist in early identification of possible influenza-like illnesses).
 - In order to minimize introduction of influenza into the school, schools should be prepared to do universal symptom and selected temperature screening of students and staff before they enter the building. Depending on the severity of a pandemic influenza strain, it may become necessary to actively find and exclude students and staff who may be infected with influenza and who are potentially highly contagious.
- Be familiar with the role of the State of Illinois.
 - What kind of authority will State officials assume?
 - What kind of help will State be expected to provide?
 - The Governor may declare a civil emergency, or the Director of Public Health may declare a public health emergency. In an emergency, they could give an order to close schools for a period of time to reduce the rate of spread of influenza.
 - Regardless of whether an emergency is declared or schools are closed, the state government will be very closely monitoring the influenza situation and providing information to the public, including schools, regarding the severity of the influenza strain, what can be expected, the course of the pandemic, and what additional steps can be taken to minimize everyone's chances of developing illness.
 - The state government will also be receiving antiviral agents and whatever vaccine is available and making them available to healthcare workers constantly exposed to influenza and to the most severely affected persons and groups.
 - It is important for key school officials to know how to access the latest information from the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Illinois Department of Public Health on the pandemic, vaccine, antivirals and protective measures, and to be knowledgeable enough to convey it to staff and students.
 - Be familiar with possible reasons to close schools and who should make that decision.

- Schools could be closed for either of two reasons:
 - First, there could be levels of absenteeism among staff and/or students that make it difficult to achieve the educational mission. The decision to close on this basis is an individual school decision in conjunction with guidance from the school medical advisor and local health departments. Many schools close if absenteeism is in the range of 30%-40%.
 - Second, schools could close specifically to slow the spread of influenza. Close contact among many persons in schools make them a center for respiratory disease transmission, including influenza. If school closing for this purpose is to be effective, it should be done early in an epidemic before absenteeism rates climb very much, and in concert with all other schools, many workplaces, and with closing other public gathering places. In addition, to be effective, students and staff must stay apart from each other when they are not in school. A decision for closing for this reason will be made by the Governor. Schools could be closed for several weeks to several months.
- Determine in advance and let staff know what your sick leave policies will be for absences unique to a pandemic.
- Make specific plans for how to continue students' education if schools are closed (i.e. web-based distance learning, telephone trees, mailed lessons, instruction via TV and radio).
- Test/practice your plan.

DURING

Things to be considered if a pandemic occurs:

- Determine how school district will continue to operate (buildings, payroll, communications, etc.). Need to assume that up to 40% of staff may be absent and schools could be temporarily closed for several weeks to months.
- Determine how school district will communicate with students and staff.
- Determine who will make decision to re-open the schools. (Superintendent, Health Director, State of Illinois).
 - This will vary depending on who makes the initial decision to close. If it is a local decision to close, it will be a local decision to re-open. If it is

a state decision to close schools, then it may be a state decision to re-open them.

- Determine how people will continue to get paid. Given that schools could be closed for as long as two months, some may not be able to manage that long without their regular income.
- Determine what technology resources are available and how they will be used.
- Determine if schools will be used by community as emergency triage centers.
 - It is possible that some schools could be used as emergency triage centers. In a worse-case scenario, hospitals would be full to capacity. Hospital and local health officials would then implement plans being developed to provide basic supportive care to those who could not be taken care of at home. Some of these supportive care sites could be schools. As part of the community wide planning, schools need to work with their local health department and other community agencies to determine whether your school may be used for this purpose.
- Determine if school days missed will have to be made up.
 - This is a decision that will have to be made after the peak of a pandemic. It is too unpredictable at this time when during the year a pandemic might start and for how long schools might be closed. For example, the recent pandemics in 1957 and 1968 were mild enough that schools were not overly disrupted and it was possible to complete the full school year.
- Determine what kind of psychological support the school district will provide.
 - Develop your plan based on your existing crisis response plan.
- Determine whether universal screening should be done with students and staff.
 - Staff and students suspected of influenza should be isolated in a room, given a mask, and sent home.
 - Establish policies for transporting ill students home.
- Determine what needs to be done to ensure the school is safe for students and staff to return to the school buildings.

AFTER

Things to be considered when students and staff return to school:

- Determine what steps need to be taken to ensure staff is in place when students return.
- Determine what kind of psychological support will be needed for students and staff.
- Determine what other kinds of support will be needed for students and staff.

RESOURCES

Listed below are resources that may be useful to school districts in developing their plans:

American Red Cross – Masters of Disaster

<http://www.redcross.org/disaster/masters/>

Information and lesson plans to assist students cope with disasters

“Cover your cough and germ stoppers” –

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/covercough.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/stopgerms.htm>

“Curriculum” – <http://www.nfsmi.org/Information/handsindex.html>

“Guidelines For An Educational Response To Pandemic Influenza”,
Capitol Region Education Council, Jackie Wasta, Phone: 860.524.4025

“HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan”

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (available at

www.hhs.gov/pandemic flu/plan)

“Pandemic Influenza UPDATE” newsletter at cdu4@cdc.gov

“Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities”

U.S. Department of Education (available on Department’s website at

www.ed.gov/emergency plan)

“School District (K-12) Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist”

(available at www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/schoolchecklist)

Spokane Washington website available at

<http://www.esd101.net/default.aspx>

“Staying Healthy” – <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab3.html#healthy>

Tips for talking about disasters: Managing anxiety in times of crisis

<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/managinganxiety/tips.asp>

A CHECKLIST

The U.S. government and experts in infectious disease suggest these items for stockpiling:

Food

Items that can be eaten without cooking (in case the power is out), such as peanut butter and crackers; canned meat, fish, fruits and vegetables; baby food and formula; dry cereals; protein bars; beverages; and a manual can opener. Don't forget extra food for your pets.

Water

A gallon per person per day, more if there is a nursing mother, children, pets or a sick person in the house.

Medical Needs

Prescribed supplies such as glucose and blood pressure monitoring equipment; prescription medicines (you may have to work with your insurance company to get an extra prescription filled); fever reducers such as ibuprofen; antidiarrheal medicines; a thermometer; and fluids with electrolytes (such as Gatorade or Pedialyte). You also should stock up on personal toiletries.

Activities

Home-learning supplies, in case schools are closed, and toys, books, games and DVDs.

Other Supplies

Flashlight, portable radio, batteries, trash bags, bleach, paper towels and matches.

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