

Pandemic Planning Update



Manitoba school divisions and schools have been extremely responsible and responsive in managing and implementing H1N1 flu preparedness initiatives. While it is not possible to anticipate how H1N1 flu will affect students and staff in schools, the pandemic preparedness planning in place is a best practice that will help reduce the effects of any operational challenges.

Government will continue to provide and communicate updated public health information and advice. Regular information bulletins will be sent to update educators and administrators on H1N1 flu in Manitoba.

Commonly Asked Questions and Answers

Is H1N1 flu information available in languages other than English and French?

The Hand Hygiene and Cough Etiquette posters have been translated into the following languages/dialects: Amharic (Ethiopia), Dakota, Dene, Cantonese, Cree, German, Korean, Ojibwe, Oji-Cree, Polish, Portuguese (Portugal not Brazilian Portuguese dialect), Punjabi, Michif, Russian, Spanish (Central America/Mexico not mainland European Spanish), Tagalog, Ukrainian and Vietnamese. Posters in additional languages will be added to the website as they are developed. These posters are available at www.manitoba.ca/flu and at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/flu/index.html.

Is H1N1 flu infection prevention advice available in a child friendly format?

A DVD and posters for children encouraging healthy practices related to coughing and sneezing and hand washing have recently been distributed to schools for posting in washrooms and classrooms. Additional copies of these posters may be ordered through the provincial government's **Materials Distribution Agency** at **204-945-3000**. The posters are also available at the following websites:

www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/flu/index.html

www.manitoba.ca/flu

Who will advise school divisions that a school may be reopened in the event of a closure? Will there be a requirement to meet some criteria before a reopening can occur?

The Minister of Education will advise a division when a school is to be reopened. Such decisions will be made in consultation with Manitoba Health and Healthy Living, Citizenship and Youth officials who will provide such direction based on consultation with the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer and/or your regional medical officer of health.

What is the recommended procedure for sanitizing the interior of a school bus and how frequently should the bus be sanitized in the event of flu-like activity in the community?

At present, health officials are recommending normal cleaning procedures for schools and school

buses. For information on building and equipment hygiene, please also refer to Appendix F of the *Preparedness Guidelines for Manitoba School Divisions and Schools (K -12) October 2007*.

Will additional funding to school divisions be available for costs associated with preparing for, responding to and recovering from H1N1 flu (additional sanitizing supplies and custodial services, substitute teacher costs, etc.)?

The financial effects of H1N1 flu will affect all of the public sector. It is possible that various levels of government will provide some financial assistance for related incremental costs. As recommended in the *Preparedness Guidelines for Manitoba School Divisions and Schools (K-12) p.24* posted at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/flu/index.html school divisions and funded independent schools are advised to track incremental costs in anticipation of possible financial assistance that may become available.

Has any consideration been given to delaying provincial standards tests if there is a closure?

Provincial standards tests cannot be delayed as they are aligned with semester end dates.

In the case of a significant disruption in instruction related to pandemic H1N1 flu leading up to the test administration, the department will employ a sensitive and reasonable application of the provincial exemption policy. In such a case, schools, with the approval of parents of affected students, can contact the department to request exemptions from writing a provincial standards test for which they are registered. Information and instructions about exemptions are contained on page 8 of *Policies and Procedures for Standards Tests* (http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/docs/pol_proc/index.html).

Students absent on the day(s) of a standards test due to illness are granted an excused absence and assigned a school-based mark for the course.

In the case of a school closure at the time of test administration, *"Students are excused from a standards test and assigned a school-based mark for a course when they are unable to write a standards test at the prescribed time..."* (*Policies and Procedures for Standards Tests, page 11*).

In the unlikely event that there would be a number of school closures across the province around the time of test administration, special measures will be considered.

What obligation do employers have related to the health and safety of pregnant staff in regards to H1N1 flu?

As an employer, a school division is responsible under *The Workplace Safety and Health Act* to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of all school staff, and to comply with the legislation and regulations. This includes providing all staff with information, instruction, and training to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, their safety, health and welfare on the job.

This responsibility under the Act may be fulfilled, at least in part, by developing and implementing policies that address the routine measures for preventing spread of infection. This could include reminding students and staff to stay home when ill and to return when they are well enough to attend work or school. To help you with this process, Manitoba Health and Healthy Living, Citizenship and Youth has developed the guidance document *H1N1 Flu: Background and Interim Guidance for School Administrators and Staff*, which was sent to superintendents on August 14, 2009.

The legislation also provides that a worker may refuse to work or do particular work where he or she believes on reasonable grounds that the work is a danger to his or her safety or health. The worker must report the refusal to work to the employer, who must remedy the dangerous

condition, if any, right away. If not remedied, the person who received the refusal to work report or a designated person must inspect the workplace and take necessary actions to remedy any dangerous condition or ensure this is done. If a dangerous condition is not remedied, a safety and health officer designated under the act may be notified. The officer will investigate the matter and decide whether the work is a danger to the worker's safety or health.

If the officer decides the work is in fact a danger to the worker, the officer will make an order. Where the dangerous condition is remedied, the worker would not be entitled to continue to refuse to work. If you have questions or concerns about workplace safety and health and the right to refuse work, please contact **Workplace Safety and Health** at **945-6848**.

What should a school do when a visibly ill child is in attendance at school?

A school should implement its usual procedures for separating an ill child from others until a parent or guardian can be contacted to take the child home, or the child returns home at the end of the day. Where the school has advised the parent/guardian that the child is or appears to be unwell, and the child continues to be sent to school without any evident improvement in their health, the principal may wish to speak with his/her public health nurse for advice or assistance in dealing with the matter.

Should unusual absenteeism in a school be reported to the local public health contact and the Education Administration Services Branch of the department if it is known that students are away for non-medical reasons?

Yes, it is the expectation that school divisions will report all unusual school absenteeism information daily to their local public health contact and the department. This includes absenteeism related to flu-like illnesses, other circulating viruses or non-medical reasons. A school is likely to report to public health that there are many ill children described (by parents) as having "the flu"; or, a number of students are away due to non-medical reasons; or, the school is unsure, but it may involve some medical reason.

Are school divisions required to report unusually high absenteeism on each individual school website or can a school division report the absenteeism of each school on the divisional website?

Although some schools may choose to report on their own websites, it is not a requirement. School divisions are required to report absenteeism for each school on the divisional website. This reporting helps ensure that parents receive proper notice of absenteeism in the school their child attends.

How should a school division report absenteeism if the internet is not an appropriate or effective way to communicate with a community?

If internet access is not widely available to your school communities or is not an effective way to communicate with parents, other arrangements can be considered. This could include having schools send information home with students for parents.

If a school has unusually high absenteeism on consecutive days, are school divisions required to report daily or can they report at the beginning and the end of the occurrence of unusually high absenteeism?

The expectation is that school divisions will report unusually high absenteeism for each school to both public health and the department where it occurs on a daily basis. This approach provides the best opportunity for appropriate responses from public health officials and the department, where necessary, based upon current information.

If schools are not able to provide accurate attendance reports until the end of the school day, is it possible to report the absenteeism the following morning?

Unusually high absenteeism should be reported to both the local public health contact and the department as soon as it is known. School division websites should be updated as soon as possible following this reporting. This will ensure that parents receive up to date information regarding absenteeism at their local school.

How long will school divisions be required to report on absenteeism?

School divisions will be required to report at least through the expected second wave of H1N1flu this fall. An update will be provided to school divisions when the situation changes.

Reminders

Absenteeism Reporting Requirement

As recently communicated by the minister, a new reporting requirement has been introduced regarding absenteeism in schools. School division websites must now include absentee information for each school. Additionally, other arrangements may need to be considered by schools where website and/or widespread internet access is not available or is not an effective means of communicating this information to parents. This may include sending the information home with students for parents.

There is no requirement to report information about the percentage of students away, number of students away, reasons for absenteeism, or any other attendance data. Schools are asked to post one of the two following message as appropriate:

No unusual absenteeism reported. OR Higher than usual absenteeism reported.

This absentee information must be accompanied by the following descriptor:

When a report of unusual absenteeism is received, the school contacts public health for expert advice and direction. Public health will tell the school if any changes need to be made to reduce the spread of infection, and the school will inform parents of these recommended changes.

It is important to note that absenteeism reports may not be because of the flu. Absenteeism may be related to other medical or non-medical reasons.

In addition, absenteeism in schools due to illness must be reported to the department following the reporting of such information to the local public health nurse or contact. This information should be communicated to the department by school divisions as soon as the information is received and be directed via e-mail to David Yeo, Director of Education Administration Services Branch, at david.yeo@gov.mb.ca

H1N1 Flu Information Websites

The following websites have up-to-date information about H1N1 flu and the activities taking place across the province to keep Manitobans healthy.

www.manitoba.ca/flu

www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/flu

www.fightflu.ca

School divisions may wish to add links to the above-noted websites to their own divisional internet sites if this has not already been done.