

Interim Guidance: September 8, 2009**NM Department of Health Recommendations for School (K-12) Responses to Influenza during the 2009-2010 School Year**

On August 7, 2009, CDC released its Guidance for State and Local Public Health Officials and School Administrators for School (K-12) Responses to Influenza during the 2009-2010 School Year. This guidance can be found at <http://www.flu.gov/plan/school/schoolguidance.html> and is designed to reduce exposure to flu (including H1N1) without major disruptions at school. The CDC no longer recommends that schools be closed only because H1N1 flu is diagnosed in a student or school employee. Based on the current flu severity and CDC guidance, the NM DOH recommends all schools take the following specific actions this school year:

Recommended school responses for the 2009-2010 school year***Under current conditions with similar flu severity as in spring 2009***

Stay home when sick: Those with flu-like illness (fever [100°F { 37.8°C } or greater] plus at least cough or sore throat) should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines. They should stay home even if they are using antiviral drugs.

- Parents should be encouraged to keep sick kids home.
- School staff should be encouraged to stay home if ill.
- At school registration, ensure contact information is complete.

Separate ill students and staff: Students and staff who appear to have flu-like illness should be sent to a room separate from others until they can be sent home. They should wear a surgical mask, if tolerated and mask is available. If they cannot tolerate a mask, those who care for ill students and staff should wear a mask, if available.

- Nursing staff should identify possible isolation rooms for ill students.
- Nursing offices should be equipped with masks, if possible.

Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette: The foundations of influenza prevention are simple but important: along with staying home when sick, wash hands frequently with soap and water when possible, and cover noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or a shirt sleeve or elbow if no tissue is available).

- Bathrooms should be appropriately stocked with soap and paper towels.
- Consider hand sanitizer in classrooms and cafeteria.
- Allow students time to wash.
- Actively promote hand hygiene and cough etiquette.

Routine cleaning: School staff should routinely clean areas that students and staff touch often with the cleaners they typically use. Special cleaning with bleach and other non-detergent-based cleaners is not necessary.

Early treatment of high-risk students and staff: People at high risk for influenza complications who become ill with influenza-like illness should speak with their health care provider as soon as possible. Early treatment with antiviral medications is very important for people at high risk because it can prevent hospitalizations and deaths. People at high risk include

those who are pregnant or who have pulmonary conditions such as asthma, metabolic disorders or diabetes, compromised immune systems, or neuromuscular diseases.

Consideration of selective school dismissal: Although there are only a few schools where all or most students are at high risk (for example, schools for medically fragile children or for pregnant students), the Public Education Department and Health Department in collaboration with local school authorities might decide to dismiss such a school during an outbreak to better protect these high-risk students.

Consideration of school-based vaccination clinics: Both seasonal flu vaccine and H1N1 flu vaccine are recommended this year and will be available this fall. Contact your regional school health advocate (contact information is below) or local public health office to find out more about school-based vaccination clinics.

Review of school policies: Consider revising school policies this flu season so that students who are absent due to a flu-like illness would need only a parent/guardian note and not a physician's note to return to school. Review school policies and awards criteria to avoid any incentives for students or staff to go to school when sick (e.g., cancel perfect attendance awards).

In general, school dismissals should only be considered if attendance reaches a level that makes operations of a school impractical. Schools that dismiss students should remain open to teachers and staff so they can continue to provide instruction through other means. The decision to dismiss students should be made by the Health Department and the Public Education Department in collaboration with local school authorities. The decision should balance the goal of reducing the number of people who become seriously ill or die from influenza with the goal of minimizing social disruption and safety risks associated with school dismissal. If the decision is made to dismiss all students, notify CDC and your state health and education agency by reporting a school or school district dismissal at www.cdc.gov/FluSchoolDismissal.

Preparing for the flu: a Toolkit for NM Schools has been developed based on the CDC's Toolkit for Schools. It contains more information and resources to help NM schools implement recommendations.

For more information, contact Dr. Mary M. Ramos, Office of School and Adolescent Health, NMDOH at: 505-222-8684 or marym.ramos@state.nm.us.

For local information, contact your regional School Health Advocate:

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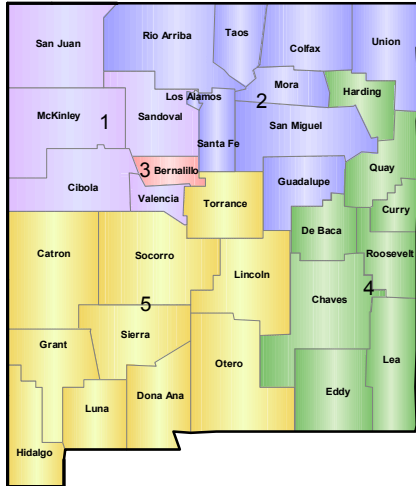
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Links for More Information:

CDC Guidance: www.flu.gov/plan/school/schoolguidance.html

CDC Technical Report: www.flu.gov/plan/school/k12techreport.html

More Posters for Schools about Flu Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/toolkit/posters.htm>

Main CDC and US Health and Human Services Websites

www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/

www.flu.gov

New Mexico Department of Health

www.nmhealth.org/H1N1/index.shtml

New Mexico Public Education Department:

www.sde.state.nm.us/press/2009/h1n1/index.html