



Disaster/Emergency Preparedness

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State Guidance: Responding to the H1N1 Flu

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The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have created the framework below to assist **schools and districts** in developing and/or improving plans to prepare for and respond to an influenza pandemic.

Following the framework are examples of action that **state policy leaders** can take to assist schools and districts.

| Framework | Key Elements | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| Planning & Coordination | Involve all relevant stakeholders. | Incorporate requirements of students with special needs. | Include periodic tests and reviews of the plan. |
| Continuity of Student Learning and Core Operations | Plan for student and staff absences due to illness, school closings and extracurricular activities. Consider various levels of outbreak. | Create alternative procedures to assure continuity of instruction if school closes. | Include a continuity of operations plan for essential central office functions including payroll and ongoing communication with students and parents. |
| Infection Control Policies and Procedures | Implement effective infection prevention policies and procedures that help limit the spread of influenza at schools in the district. | Provide sufficient and accessible infection prevention supplies, such as soap, alcohol-based/waterless hand hygiene products (containing at least 60% alcohol), tissues and receptacles for their disposal. | Include procedures for students and staff sick leave absences unique to a pandemic influenza (e.g., non-punitive, liberal leave). |
| Communications Planning | Include a dissemination plan for communication with staff, students, and families, including lead spokespersons and links to other communication networks. Ensure language, culture and reading level appropriateness in communications. | Advise district staff, students and families where to find up-to-date and reliable pandemic information from federal, state and local public health sources. | Anticipate the potential fear and anxiety of staff, students, and families as a result of rumors and misinformation and plan communications accordingly. |

Highlights of What States Are Doing:

1. Develop/Revise Plans

- [California](#) and [Utah](#) – State Department of Education Web sites provide pandemic influenza and crisis planning checklists.

- [Wisconsin](#) – State Department of Education is holding pandemic flu planning workshops for school and community teams.
- [Texas](#) – State Department of Education Web site instructs districts on how to handle testing cancellations due to the flu.
- [West Virginia](#) – State statute requires all boards of education to incorporate hand washing into the communicable disease policy. Also requires an allowance for hand washing to be incorporated into the daily routine of all students, especially before eating, after blowing the nose, after going to the bathroom and as deemed necessary by school officials. W. VA. Code § 126-51-5(5.1).

2. Distribute Plans and Relevant Information

Using the power of the internet

- [Virginia](#) and [Oregon](#) – State Department of Education Web sites devote a separate page to the H1N1 flu, providing current, accessible information to the public.

Accommodating those without internet access

- [New Mexico](#) and [Maine](#) – State Departments of Education provide hotlines for questions about the flu.

Providing translation where significant language barriers exist

- [Missouri](#) – State Department of Education provides pandemic influenza guides in English, Spanish and Bosnian.

3. Implement Plans

Providing tools

- [Oregon](#) – State Department of Education Web site provides template letters for school closure and talking points for school officials.

Providing guidance

- [Massachusetts](#) – State Department of Education Web site provides guidance on school closure and communication with parents.

Helping schools/districts address challenges related to closures

- [Indiana](#) and [Virginia](#) – State Department of Education Web sites provide questions and answers regarding penalties and waivers for not meeting the minimum number of instructional days.

Worrisome finding: A May 2009 publication from the Institute for Education Sciences (Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools) reports that only 36.1% of schools surveyed have a written plan for dealing with pandemic flu. The report uses data from the 2007-08 School Survey on Crime and Safety which asks public school principals about the frequency of incidents and school policies implemented to prevent and reduce crime in schools. The use of the term “school” in the question raises the issue of whether the principals responded on behalf of their school or the district. Thus, while it is possible that some respondents interpreted the "school" reference in the question as exclusive of a district plan, assumedly principals would consider a district plan a school plan.

Is your state doing something to assist schools and districts prepare for and respond to the H1N1 flu that you think should be replicated? If so, please e-mail Molly Ryan, at mrryan@ecs.org.

Resources:

- [H1N1, avian and pandemic flu information](#)
- [School District \(K-12\) Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention H1N1 flu information](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education H1N1 flu information](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education Crisis Planning Brochure](#)

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