

This afternoon, the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued updated guidance on school closures in relation to the outbreak of H1N1 Influenza (Swine Flu). The decision to close schools to deter the spread of H1N1 and, by extension, the decision to reopen schools that had been closed due to the outbreak is a local decision that must be made in consultation with state and local health authorities. As such, we strongly recommend that each district contact its local public health department to discuss this updated guidance.

As noted by the CDC, guidance and recommendations must be flexible and change as more information about the disease becomes available. To that end, the CDC no longer recommends school closures based solely upon a confirmed or suspected case of H1N1 Influenza. The following points are the most current recommendations from the CDC:

- School closure is not advised for a suspected or confirmed case of novel influenza A (H1N1) and, in general, is not advised unless there is a magnitude of faculty or student absenteeism that interferes with the school's ability to function.
- Schools that were closed based on previous interim CDC guidance related to this outbreak may reopen.
- Students, faculty or staff with influenza-like illness (fever with a cough or sore throat) should stay home and not attend school or go into the community except to seek medical care for at least 7 days even if symptoms resolve sooner.
- Students, faculty and staff who are still sick 7 days after they become ill should continue to stay home from school until at least 24 hours after symptoms have resolved.
- Students, faculty and staff who appear to have an influenza-like illness at arrival or become ill during the school day should be isolated promptly in a room separate from other students and sent home.
- Parents and guardians should monitor their school-aged children, and faculty and staff should self-monitor every morning for symptoms of influenza-like illness.
- Ill students should not attend alternative child care or congregate in settings outside of school.
- School administrators should communicate regularly with local public health officials to obtain guidance about reporting of influenza-like illnesses in the school.
- Schools can help serve as a focus for educational activities aimed at promoting ways to reduce the spread of influenza, including hand hygiene and cough etiquette.
- Students, faculty and staff should stringently follow sanitary measures to reduce the spread of influenza, including covering their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or coughing or sneezing into their sleeve if a tissue isn't available), frequently washing hands with soap and water, or using hand sanitizer if hand washing with soap and water is not possible.

As noted in the aforementioned recommendations, CDC guidance now focuses upon ways to identify ill students and to keep those students away from the general school population until they are no longer infectious. Clearly, basic sanitary measures are also an important part of limiting the spread of the disease. For additional information regarding the H1N1 influenza outbreak, please visit http://www.isbe.net/htmls/swine_flu.htm.