



October 23, 2009

## **H1N1 (swine) flu: What you need to know**

*Note: Information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYCDOH) and the New York State Department of Labor Public Employees Safety and Health (NYS DOL PESH) Bureau was used in part to prepare this fact sheet.*

### **What is H1N1 flu?**

H1N1 flu (“swine flu”) is caused by a virus similar to regular (seasonal) flu. The illness can cause fever, cough, sore throat, tiredness, aches, chills and stuffy nose. Some affected people have also reported diarrhea and vomiting. Since April 2009, it has caused outbreaks of flu-like illness among people in New York City and in many countries around the world.

### **Transmission**

H1N1 flu spreads when a sick person coughs or sneezes. You can also get infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching your own mouth or nose. Persons at close contact (within six feet) with a suspected or confirmed case are known to be at higher risk of infection.

### **High Risk Groups**

Most people recover without medication but some people are more likely to get severely ill with the flu. Those at risk include everyone over 65, under 2 or pregnant, and anyone with long-term health problems such as asthma, diabetes, lung, heart, kidney, liver or blood disorders, those on long-term aspirin therapy or those with immune compromised systems.

If you are high-risk and have flu symptoms or you have close contact with someone who has the flu, call your health care provider immediately.

### **Prevention**

Take the same precautions you would to avoid regular seasonal flu and other respiratory infections:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Avoid touching your nose, mouth or eyes.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people. If you get sick yourself, avoid close contact with other people.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues, sleeves or elbows.

**When experiencing influenza like symptoms such as fever and cough:**

- Stay home until your symptoms resolve, and don't return to work or school until you have been free of fever for at least 24 hours.
- Avoid going to the hospital if you have mild flu-like symptoms such as fever and cough – even if you think you could have H1N1 flu. People with flu usually recover without medical treatment, but other illnesses can cause fever, so call your doctor if you are in doubt. You should rest, drink plenty of liquids and take the medications you would normally use to treat symptoms.

**When should you go to the emergency room or hospital**

- You should go to the emergency room or hospital if you have severe symptoms. Severe symptoms include trouble breathing or shortness of breath (rapid breathing in children), pain or pressure in the chest or stomach, bluish skin color, dizziness or confusion, increasing fever, or vomiting that won't stop.

## **What should the UFT Chapter Leader and members be prepared for when school opens?**

### **School Protocols:**

The UFT is working with the NYCDOE and New York City Department of Health to make sure schools are prepared. The UFT, DOE and DOH will hold weekly conference calls to assess H1N1 protocols and responses. The following protocols are in place:

### **Every school should have a school specific plan of action for flu preparedness following the guidelines below.**

- If students or staff have flu symptoms (greater than 100.0° F fever, coughing, sore throat, shortness of breath, runny nose, aches, pain, vomiting or diarrhea), they should stay home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- The school administration should inform parents that they must keep children with flu symptoms (fevers and either coughs or sore throats) at home until at least 24 hours they are free of fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- Ill students (with fever and cough or sore throat or shortness of breath) should be isolated in the nurse's office or designated satellite isolation rooms (if the medical office is crowded) until their parents arrive. These students should not be returned to the classroom, sent to the general office or guidance counselors'/deans office. They should be separated from other students and sent home immediately (when possible).
- Students who are sent home with symptoms should not return to school until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.

### If the school has students or staff with flu symptoms:

- Staff members at risk for complications from the flu should immediately consult their physicians for preventive measures.
- Pregnant staff and other at-risk members who do not feel well should immediately see a doctor.
- The standard operating protocols for the cleaning of cafeterias, bathrooms and hard surfaces such as doorknobs should be maintained. Hard surfaces should be cleaned immediately when visibly soiled.
- There should be adequate supplies of soap and paper towels in the bathrooms.
- There should be adequate/increased ventilation – make sure windows are open as much as feasible depending on the weather and mechanical ventilation systems should provide maximum amounts of outside air.
- Chapter leaders and staff members should not interfere with the operations of the medical office. This is to ensure efficient and safe operation of the medical office. The school administration will inform chapter leaders on a daily basis about absences and activity in the medical office.

- The school administration in consultation with the NYCDOE and NYCDOHMH will make sure there is the appropriate personal protective equipment in the school.
- The NYCDOE and NYCDOHMH will plan and provide for coverage for schools that do not have a nurse or other health care personnel and coverage for school nurses who are out sick.

### **Monitoring/Surveillance and Daily Posting of Absentee Rates and ILI**

- School nurses will use a city-wide data base to report the number of students seen for influenza-like illness (ILI) in school each day. ILI is defined as fever with cough or sore throat.
- If more than 5 students with ILI, the following actions will be implemented:
  - Parents will receive a second letter to keep sick children at home.
  - Preventive measures including hand washing will be reinforced.
- If on a single day more than 4 percent of the student body (at least 15 students) is being seen by the nurse for ILI, the following actions will be implemented:
  - A doctor or supervising nurse will visit the school to assess the situation to shore up the schools' infection control efforts and to determine whether the school has students whose health conditions put them at high risk of influenza complications.
  - If the school has a high concentration of medically vulnerable children the DOH may consider closing the school. If the Health Commissioner makes the recommendation to close a school, it is up to the DOE Chancellor, not the principal, to accept or deny that recommendation.
- Daily the DOH and DOE will post absentee rates and ILI on the [www.nyc.gov/flu](http://www.nyc.gov/flu) website. The City will list all schools reporting 5 or more cases of ILI on the previous day. The daily report will also show the previous day's absentee rates for every public school.

### **Vaccination Program**

- Beginning late October/early November, the NYC Department of Health (DOH) will offer in-school H1N1 vaccinations for all elementary school students and at centrally located school sites on the weekends for middle and high school students. This vaccination program also includes District 75 and charter school sites.
- The H1N1 vaccine will be provided free of charge and on a voluntary basis to those students with parental/legal guardian consent.
- For more information about the DOH/DOE vaccination program, including vaccination schedules, please go to <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/flu/html/schools/vaccination.shtml>.