



Pandemic Response

Update 2 – October 26, 2009

H1N1 Influenza is in our community and schools

As was anticipated by public health officials, the second phase of the H1N1 virus has hit our community and schools. We have noticed an increase in influenza-like **illness and absenteeism** among students. As such, we want to provide parents with an update as to how we are responding.

We are working closely with **Alberta Health Services (AHS)** and also receiving information from the **Public Health Agency of Canada** in responding to the H1N1 influenza pandemic. We rely on their knowledge and expertise to help guide our responses and decisions.

Our Pandemic Response Plan, other references and resources, as well as updates as they come available, are posted at:
www.rdpsd.ab.ca/pandemic

A Balanced Approach to Pandemic:

Red Deer Public Schools has developed a comprehensive plan in response to the current pandemic. Our plan looks to balance **preventing** the spread of the influenza virus while **minimizing disruptions** and **supporting learning**. It is important to note that while the pandemic is serious, we need to remember that the symptoms for H1N1 have generally been minimal and similar to that of seasonal influenza that we experience each year.

What are the influenza-like-illness symptoms?

Influenza-like illness (ILI) is defined as: the sudden onset of **respiratory symptoms** with new cough and fever (not always present) with one or more of: sore throat; muscle aches; joint pain; weakness. Gastrointestinal symptoms such as vomiting or diarrhea may also be present.

Is there H1N1 in my school?

AHS believes increased illness is likely due to pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza because this virus is the cause of most of the ILI that is being seen in school populations currently. Given the current levels of illness, AHS is **limiting testing** so we are not sure as to the extent of H1N1 influenza in our schools. As such no official notification will be provided if there is H1N1 in particular schools. Should absenteeism related to illness exceed 10%, a letter will be sent home under the recommendation and direction of Public Health.

Prevention remains the key

Prevention plays an important role in minimizing the impact of H1N1. Strategies we are following include:

- Promoting and reminding students and staff of basic **infection control** practices such as respiratory hygiene, and frequent hand cleaning.
- Notifying parents if **students become ill** with ILI at school. Ill students will be kept separated from others until picked up by parents/ guardians.
- Advising ill students/ staff to **stay home**.
- Carrying out frequent **environmental cleaning** including high touch surfaces.
- **Monitoring** student and staff absentee rates due to illness.

What if my child has influenza-like illness?

We ask parents to **keep ill children at home** until they are free of symptoms and feeling well, and are able to fully participate in all normal daily school activities; this applies to staff as well. Encourage and remind your children to use respiratory hygiene (i.e. cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, or cough and sneeze into their sleeve, dispose of used tissues and wash hands afterwards using soap and water, use alcohol-based hand rub if there is no access to soap and water).

H1N1 Vaccination Programs:

With H1N1 vaccinations now approved, Alberta Health Services has scheduled **vaccination clinics** which are posted on their website:

<http://www4.albertahealthservices.ca/immunization/>

Health officials believe that vaccination is the most effective form of prevention and **strongly encourage** individuals to get vaccinated.

Please note that AHS is NOT planning on running immunization programs within schools. Children will need to attend the general clinics for immunization.

Will schools be closing?

At this time there are **no plans** to close schools. The Public Health Agency of Canada continues to recommend against the widespread closure of schools and this recommendation will be followed in Alberta. Any decisions affecting school operations will be made in consultation with and based on recommendations of Alberta Health Services with a focus on preventing the spread of the influenza virus while minimizing disruptions and supporting learning.

Other Suggestions:

- Plan in advance for **childcare** at home if your child gets sick or school is dismissed.
- Plan to **monitor the health of your children** for symptoms of influenza-like illness that include: fever, cough, muscle aches, lethargy and lack of appetite.
- Be sure that our schools have up-to-date **contact information** for your family.

Pandemic Websites:

The Alberta Health and Wellness website provides answers to common questions about the Pandemic H1N1 Influenza Virus:

<http://www.health.alberta.ca/health-info/influenza-H1N1-questions.html>

Keep up to date:

We encourage families to subscribe to our ListServ at:
<http://listserv.rdpsd.ab.ca/>
which will e-mail important information to parents, including pandemic updates, with an option of receiving regular news from your school as well.

