



Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board

Post in Staff Room
Copies are on the district website at:
Home page > Quick Links > H1N1 flu virus information

A Great Place to Learn and A Great Place to Work!

Chair of the Board: Carl Pitman

Director of Education: Kathy Soule

Questions and answers about H1N1

Updated November 3, 2009

DISTRICT RESPONSE TO H1N1

Q1. How is Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board responding to H1N1?

- A. District officials are in daily contact with Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit. The health unit is very sensitive to school board concerns and the operation of schools. District officials take health-related advice and direction from the local health unit.

Q2. Are there plans to close schools because of H1N1?

- A. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit continue to not recommend the widespread closure of schools. Doing so may not be effective in preventing transmission as students and staff may be exposed to the virus in other community settings, such as malls. The benefits of keeping schools open currently outweigh the risk of transmission in these settings.

Q3. How are decisions made about what needs to be done for H1N1?

- A. H1N1 is a health issue. Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board takes its direction from health officials—specifically Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit. Direction and information is also received from the provincial Medical Officer of Health and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The board complies with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care *Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 in Elementary and Secondary Schools*.

HOW TO AVOID GETTING THE FLU

Q4. What can be done to avoid getting the flu?

- A. According to health officials, everyone should continue to practice basic infection control such as hand washing, coughing and sneezing into a tissue or sleeve, and staying home when ill. Anyone in a high-risk category should consider getting the H1N1 flu vaccine. Dates, times and locations of flu clinics are listed on the health unit website.

USE OF HAND SANITIZER

Q5. Does the board provide soap for classroom sinks for hand washing?

- A. Classroom sinks are provided for instructional purposes. At this point soap is not provided. Instead, hand sanitizer is being provided for every school classroom.

Q6. Why has the board provided alcohol-based hand sanitizer?

- A. Health officials recommend, when using hand sanitizers, that alcohol-based hand sanitizers are the most effective. Hand sanitizers in classrooms are to be used under supervision. Hand sanitizer is also available in school offices.

Q7: Can staff bring their own hand sanitizer in for personal use?

- A. Yes. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer is not a cleaning supply but rather a personal hand cleaning item and so it is fine to bring in and use. Staff should be aware of the need to avoid scented products.



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Q8: Can parents/guardians send hand sanitizer for use by their children in school?

- A. Yes, if it is only for the personal use of the child. It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to ensure the child is old enough to be given the hand sanitizer and to review appropriate use. Parents/guardians should be made aware of the need to avoid scented products.

ABSENCE DUE TO ILLNESS – STUDENTS AND STAFF

Q9. What if parents/guardians ask questions about the impact of H1N1, or they ask if students or staff are away because of H1N1?

- A. Student or staff absence information is confidential. Please do not have discussions with parents/guardians about the health effects of H1N1.

Questions about symptoms or risks associated with influenza should be directed to:

- Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit
 - H1N1 information line: 613.966.5513, extension 655
 - 1.800.267.2803
 - TTY: 613.966.3036 (Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.)
- a health care provider
- TeleHealth at 1.866.707.0000

Q10: How does someone ill know if it is seasonal flu or H1N1?

- A. The H1N1 virus is the predominant flu strain circulating in Ontario this fall and public health officials expect to see H1N1 in the community, including schools and businesses. Influenza is a community-acquired infection, so avoiding schools and work settings will not reduce the risk of exposure.

Q11: If cases are not reported, how are the board and public health keeping track of large numbers of cases at a single site?

- A. Student and staff absences are being actively monitored. Any site with 10% or more illness-related absences is reported to Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit, as per normal district operating procedures.

Q12: Is there a point staff and parents/guardians will be informed of cases of H1N1?

- A. If a report of a case or cluster of influenza-like illness requires additional public health action than what has already been communicated, Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit will inform the school board, provide direction and communication information, and that information will be immediately communicated to all staff, students and parents/guardians.

Q13: What if a parent/guardian wants to keep a child at home as a precaution, even if the child is not ill?

- A. The expectation is that healthy children are at school. Influenza is a community acquired infection, so avoiding settings like schools will not reduce the risk of exposure.

Q14. What if a student gets sick at school and I think it is H1N1?

- A. Only a specific clinical test can determine if a person has H1N1. Normal school procedures should be followed for student illnesses. Generally, if a student feels ill at school, the student



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should be taken to the office and the parent/guardian called to pick up the child as quickly as possible.

Q15. What additional procedures are in place to protect pregnant women and anyone with underlying health conditions or a suppressed immune system?

- A. It is important that people continue their daily lives during the pandemic. Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit does not recommend that people avoid going to work or community social events if they are healthy. In other crowded situations that cannot be avoided, extra precautions should be taken, such as frequent hand washing, to avoid picking up the virus. Consider carrying hand sanitizer for the same purpose.

According to Dr. Arlene King, provincial Medical Officer of Health:

"Ontario is not recommending exclusion of pregnant teachers from schools or other workplaces during the flu season. It is important to remember that influenza is a community acquired infection, so avoiding work settings, like schools, will not reduce the risk of exposure. Additionally, this is a relatively mild disease in the vast majority of cases (our provincial hospitalization surveillance database contains 12 or 13 H1N1-related hospitalizations in pregnant women in Ontario—no deaths). Finally, although pregnant women are at somewhat higher risk of complications from influenza every season (all types, including, it appears, H1N1, particularly in the third trimester), the risk is not high. Pregnant women and people with underlying health conditions should speak to their physician to determine if they should be treated if/when they get the flu."

Q16. Will I lose sick days if I am sick with H1N1 flu?

- A. Yes, a day taken for illness is classified as a sick day.

Q17. Do I need a doctor's note if I am home sick?

- A. The terms of the collective agreement/handbook continue to apply. If an employee is ill, sick leave is available to employees as per the collective agreement/handbook. Medical documentation may be required as per the collective agreement. This also applies to non-union employees.

CLEANING AT SCHOOLS AND OFFICES

Q18. What cleaning procedures are in place to prevent H1N1 transmission?

- A. Thorough and effective routine cleaning and disinfecting practices are in effect in schools/offices. As per standard practice, custodians provide very thorough and effective cleaning and disinfecting as part of their daily routine duties. These include cleaning surfaces that are high contact areas (e.g., student desktops, classroom tables, drinking water fountains, telephones, area designated for ill students) or high contamination areas, such as washrooms (e.g., toilet flush handles, toilet seats, hand wash sink faucets, stall and entrance doors and handles, soap and feminine product dispensers, counter tops, plumbing fixtures). As part of their regular routine, custodians use their discretion to determine if additional cleaning is required throughout the day (e.g. spills, vomit).



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Q19. Can I bring in additional cleaners to sanitize my work area? Keyboards?

- A. No. The board has defined cleaning materials. If staff bring cleaning items from home the chemicals can interact with the cleaners used by the board. The result could be toxic fumes that can cause serious injury to staff or students.

SCHOOL SPORTS EVENTS AND MUSIC INSTRUMENTS

Q20. Is there anything coaches should do about sports events where students gather?

- A. At this time, the direction from Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit is to continue all usual activities. However, coaches should remind students of the flu prevention precautions, specifically to make sure students do not share drinks/water bottles at sports events.

Q21. What should happen with music instrument mouthpieces that are shared?

- A. Schools should have a process to ensure that instrument mouthpieces are appropriately sanitized between uses.

NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Q22. Are breakfast programs, hot lunch programs and other activities involving food being cancelled?

- A. No, breakfast and lunch programs continuing under normal, diligent adult supervision.

MISCELLANEOUS

Q23: What if someone wants to wear a mask for protection?

- A. Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit does not advise children or staff to wear masks.

Q24: The water is not hot in the washrooms at the school/office. Is that a problem?

- A. Health officials say the temperature of the water is not the issue, it is how long the hands are under the water and the use of proper hand washing practices that matter.