

Guidance for School Administrations Regarding H1N1 Influenza Virus

This document provides specific recommendations from the Public Health Agency of Canada, Alberta Health and Wellness, and Alberta Health Services regarding considerations for school closures and other public health measures in response to the current H1N1 Influenza virus situation in Canada. These recommendations may change as further information about the epidemiology and severity of illness of this novel virus becomes available. We will update this guidance as necessary.

This information is based on the general recommendations included in the Public Health Measures Annex (M) of the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector which have been implemented in light of the current situation in Canada.

The goal of the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan is to first minimize serious illness and overall deaths, and second to minimize societal disruption among Canadians as a result of an influenza pandemic. In a severe pandemic, school closures, in combination with other social distancing strategies, are potentially a valuable strategy to slow the spread of disease. Currently, the H1N1 Influenza is generally causing mild illness in Canada with symptoms similar to seasonal influenza. School closures would not be appropriate as the resulting disruption would outweigh any potential benefits.

Interim Recommendation Regarding School Closures:

In light of the goals for pandemic response in Canada, and given the current occurrence of illness similar to typical seasonal influenza, **the Public Health Agency of Canada is not recommending the closure of schools at this time. This advice also applies even if a confirmed case is identified in a school.** Ill students and staff should remain at home and seek medical attention as necessary.

Other Recommendations for School Settings:

The following measures should be undertaken by schools to prevent or limit infections from occurring in schools.

1. Promote basic infection control practices:

- Wash hands frequently using soap and water, especially after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose. When soap and water are not available, hand sanitizers are an excellent choice to use if hands are not visibly dirty.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth after shaking hands or touching hard surfaces like counters and door handles or other surfaces that may harbour influenza and other viruses.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces or commonly shared items at least daily using readily available disinfectant cleansers.
- Ensure garbage containers are emptied regularly.
- Avoid close contact with people who are experiencing influenza-like symptoms.
- Encourage ill students and staff to remain at home and seek medical attention as necessary.