



# Essex County Public Health Department

## Preventive Services

---

### H1N1 Influenza

#### *Information for Parents, Teachers and School Principals about H1N1 influenza*

Concern continues about H1N1 influenza in schools this year. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) does anticipate more illness from H1N1 influenza than this past spring and more school-based outbreaks because influenza is typically transmitted more easily in the fall and winter months.

For an outbreak similar to the spring H1N1 outbreak, CDC recommends continuing basic good hygiene practices like hand washing, keeping sick students and staff away from school and helping families identify their children who are at high-risk for flu complications and should consult their physicians if they develop the flu. High risk health conditions includes: asthma, cardiovascular disease, renal, hepatic or hematological disorders, neurologic, neuromuscular or metabolic disorders.

Schools can help with the CDC message by providing students with time to wash hands during the school day and teach cough hygiene.

#### **What should I do if my child is sick?**

If your child is sick with fever, he or she should stay home and not go to school until 24 hours after the child no longer has a fever. Most children recover from influenza quickly without treatment, but those with chronic underlying conditions should call a doctor about receiving antiviral treatment. Children with signs of severe illness-such as fast breathing or trouble breathing –need medical attention immediately.

#### **What should a school employee do if a student is sick?**

The student should be evaluated by the nurse. If the nurse believes that the student may have influenza, the child should be separated from other students and sent home. The student should not take the school bus.

#### **What should a school employee do if he or she comes down with the flu?**

The person should go home and not return to school until at least 24 hours after the fever resolves. If the employee belongs to any of the higher-risk groups listed above, he or she should call a doctor to discuss treatment with antiviral medicine.

#### **Do employees or students who were out sick need a note to return to school?**

No. Employees or students do not need a note from their doctor to return to school. But they should stay home until they have had no fever for 24 hours.

#### **Children are absent from my school. How is it decided when a school should be closed?**

There is no single formula for closing a school. School administrators and Essex County Public Health Department personnel will review the circumstances occurring at the school and consider many factors, including the following:



# Essex County Public Health Department

## Preventive Services

---

- The number of visits to the school nurse by children with documented fever and flu-like illness.
- The trend of flu-like illness over several days, and the potential impact or reduced transmission over weekend days, when school is not in session.
- The percentage of the student body absent with flu-like illness.
- Reports of teachers becoming ill while they are in school.
- The percentage of staff absent with flu-like illness.

### **How can parents prepare for the possibility of school closure?**

As a parent, you can prepare by identifying a caretaker who can be with your child if school closes and you can't miss work. Talk to your employer early to determine whether you can work from home or arrange other options if you need to stay home with your child.

You can also prepare by reviewing the *individual and family influenza plan checklist* found with that checklist and more information about H1N1 and seasonal flu on the Essex County Public Health website, [www.co.essex.ny.us/publichealth](http://www.co.essex.ny.us/publichealth). You can also prepare your child by talking about the current situation.

### **What cleaning measures are needed in a school where children or staff members are ill?**

No specialized cleaning or disinfecting is required, but custodial engineers and building managers should practice good maintenance, such as:

- Regularly cleaning and disinfecting bathrooms, cafeterias and doorknobs in common area.
- Ensuring that all bathrooms are stocked with soap and paper towels.
- Opening windows to ensure that the building is properly ventilated.

### **What is Essex County Public Health doing?**

Essex County Public Health (ECPH) is actively working with hospitals and health care providers to promptly identify and investigate potential cases of H1N1 influenza. If cases are identified, ECPH is available to provide information about appropriate treatment and prevention measures. Surveillance has been increased by tracking the amount of emergency department visits for influenza like illness and pneumonia. Essex County Public Health is also working with schools in Essex County to track increases in flu-like illnesses in staff and students.

### **What is H1N1 influenza and how is it spread?**

H1N1 Influenza is a respiratory illness with symptoms that may include a fever (100 F or higher), chills, cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches and in children, may include diarrhea. Flu spreads mainly through coughing or sneezing. People can also become infected by touching a surface with virus on it, and then touching their eyes, mouth or nose.

### **How can I protect myself from H1N1 influenza?**

Here are the best ways to avoid getting or spreading H1N1 flu, seasonal flu and many other respiratory infections:

- Cover your mouth and nose whenever you cough or sneeze- and encourage others to do the same. Use your sleeve or a tissue, not your bare hand.



# Essex County Public Health Department

## Preventive Services

---

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Try to avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you get sick, stay home and away from others so you won't spread your germs.
- Vaccinate all family members against seasonal flu.
- Vaccinate children and family members against H1N1 as vaccine becomes available and priority groups for vaccination are determined by the CDC.