

## **Avoiding the Spread of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 in the School Environment**

### **Questions and Answers**

#### **Q: Should I regularly disinfect toys and other shared objects in my classroom?**

**A:** Influenza viruses including the pH1N1 (pandemic) strain can survive on environmental surfaces, including toys, for prolonged periods of time. The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care recommends routine cleaning with regular cleaning products which will inactivate the virus. The use of an appropriate disinfectant has the added benefit of inactivating other potentially harmful microorganisms in the school environment, in addition to influenza viruses. Please refer to the fact sheet “*Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection in the School Environment*” which is available on the Health Unit’s web site:

[http://www.healthunit.org/H1N1/resources/environmental\\_cleaning-H1N1.pdf](http://www.healthunit.org/H1N1/resources/environmental_cleaning-H1N1.pdf)

*Please note: while increased cleaning and disinfection will certainly help prevent the spread of pH1N1, regular hand-cleaning after contact with shared items remains the most effective practice in preventing infection, particularly before eating or before any other activity involving the touching of the mouth, nose or eyes.*

#### **Q: Our music program does not have enough instruments for each student to have their own instrument. Is there concern about students sharing instruments?**

**A:** Influenza and other viruses can very easily be spread on the mouth pieces of musical instruments. Ideally, a student should have dedicated instruments assigned only to them. If this is not possible, students should be assigned their own mouth piece. If neither of these practices are possible, mouth pieces should be cleaned with soap and water to remove saliva and then thoroughly disinfected using a suitable disinfectant, used according to manufacturer’s directions. You may wish to contact the instrument manufacturer to ensure that an appropriate product that will not harm the instrument is used.

#### **Q: Should we be concerned about water play tables used in our junior classes?**

**A:** Water play tables are easily contaminated by soiled hands and can be a common source of infection for other children. Do not allow children with runny noses to participate in water play. Empty and thoroughly disinfect the play table with a mild disinfection solution at the end of each day. Please refer to the fact sheet “*Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection in the School Environment*” which is available on the Health Unit’s web site: [http://www.healthunit.org/H1N1/resources/environmental\\_cleaning-H1N1.pdf](http://www.healthunit.org/H1N1/resources/environmental_cleaning-H1N1.pdf)

*Children should always clean their hands after participating in water play.*

#### **Q: What are the signs and symptoms of pH1N1 (influenza-like-illness)?**

**A:** Influenza-like illness is defined as the acute onset of respiratory symptoms with fever and cough and one or more of the following symptoms: sore throat, muscle aches, joint pain, or weakness. In children under 5, gastrointestinal symptoms may also be present and fever may not be prominent.

#### **Q: When is it okay to return to work or school?**

**A:** You may return to work or school once you no longer have a fever and are feeling well. A lingering cough is normal and may last for days or weeks.

**Q: Is the Health Unit recommending that school staff take temperatures of children who are ill at school?**

**A:** There is no expectation that staff will be monitoring fevers by taking temperatures of children at school. An appropriate method of assessing a sick school child will be generally visual cues. The staff person may notice that the forehead is hot, the eyes are glossy and the behavior is different than usual-most commonly more lethargic.

**Q: Is there a maximum number of times that people should use hand sanitizer? Does hand sanitizer have a residual effect at keeping hands clean after using? Can the germs become resistant to hand sanitizers the way that they become resistant to antibiotics?**

**A:** There are no maximum number of times for which hand sanitizer can be used. It continues to be effective every time it is used. . If the person finds that the hand sanitizer is leaving a residue or sticky film on their hands at any time due to high usage, it may be more comfortable to wash hands in soap and water. Hand sanitizer works on the germs that are on the hands. It will not last for the future germs. There has been no documentation that germs have become resistant to alcohol based hand sanitizers.

**Q: What type of hand sanitizer does the Health Unit recommend?**

**A:** The Health Unit, along with the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, recommends using a 60 – 90% alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR). ABHR's are currently the most effective hand sanitizer products on the market. They have the broadest range of effectiveness across the different types of viruses and bacteria. It is recommended that children use ABHR under adult supervision.

*There is limited research on the efficacy and safety of **non-alcohol** hand sanitizers.*

**Q: What about allergies to hand sanitizers?**

**A:** According to the literature, many people have fewer problems with hand sanitizer than they do with soap. If there are allergies to hand sanitizer the child will need to clean their hands with soap and water.

**Q: What kind of soap is best to use?**

**A:** All soaps are effective at removing germs from the hands. It is recommended that people avoid use of antibacterial soaps. Liquid soaps that are in single use pumps are recommended in public places.

**Q: Is it o.k. to use a full sink/bucket of water to wash the hands of a group of children?**

**A:** It is preferable to use running water for hand washing.

**Q: Is it o.k. to use cold water when washing hands?**

**A:** Cold water does not affect hand washing efficacy. However, it may decrease the willingness to wash hands properly.

**Q: If children who do not have soap and water available have dirty hands, is it acceptable practice to use hand wipes to get the dirt off and then use hand sanitizer?**

**A:** Hand sanitizer does not work properly on dirty hands (ex.-sand, mud, blood). Hand washing with soap and water is preferable to hand wipes, but if this is not possible, the child should remove dirt with hand wipes and then use hand sanitizer.

**Q: Where do teachers and students stand on the priority list for vaccination?**

**A:** On September 16<sup>th</sup> 2009, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) released a guidance statement identifying groups and individuals that will benefit most from immunization. Teachers and students are not specifically identified as a group, however, may fall into one of the identified groups below.

- people with chronic medical conditions under the age of 65;
- pregnant women;
- children six months to under five years of age;
- people living in remote and isolated settings or communities;
- health care workers involved in pandemic response or who deliver essential health services;
- household contacts and caregivers of individuals who are at high risk, and who cannot be immunized (such as infants under six months of age or people with weakened immune systems); and populations otherwise identified as high risk.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and the Health Unit are currently reviewing the guidance from PHAC and will continue to inform the public about the vaccine, and how individuals in our community can receive it as soon as possible.

Teachers and parents can also find information about pH1N1 on the Health Unit's website [www.healthunit.org](http://www.healthunit.org)

**Q: The CD that the Health Unit provided, with the “Sudsy” resources and “Lather, Rinse, Defeat Germs” video, does not work. Can schools receive another copy?**

**A:** Yes. If this is the case, please contact your Public Health Nurse Consultant (listed at the end of this document) to receive a working copy. The “Lather, Rinse, Defeat Germs” video can also be accessed on our website: <http://www.healthunit.org/H1N1/index.htm#Schools>

**Q: Can a Health Unit staff person come into the classroom to present on pH1N1/ Hand Hygiene?**

**A:** This Fall, Health Unit staff will be taking on additional responsibilities related to the planning and implementation of pH1N1 activities; as a result, we will not have the resources/ capacity to provide presentations to individual classrooms. To assist teachers with hand hygiene, we have posted curriculum resources (i.e. lesson plans, videos and posters) on our website:

<http://www.healthunit.org/H1N1/index.htm#Schools>

For more information and/or consultation, please contact your school's Public Health Nurse.

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