



WILL COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT & COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER

From: Epidemiology & Communicable Disease Program

To: School Administrators, School Nurses, Day Care Centers & Parents

October 16, 2009

Re: Influenza (H1N1 & Seasonal Influenza) in School Settings – Reporting Guidance

Dear School Administrators and School Nurses,

As anticipated we are experiencing a surge in Influenza like illness (ILI) activity throughout Will County. School absenteeism from ILI is on the rise and will continue to rise in the coming months. Please continue to report aggregate numbers of ILI illness on the Weekly Summary Report of School Attendance form. **It is not necessary to report individual cases (clinically diagnosed or by rapid influenza test at Physician's office/Emergency Room); however you should keep a daily log (if not using our form) and report to us any pattern of increased absenteeism due to ILI that might require further actions.**

Most ILI cases will be diagnosed clinically or by rapid influenza diagnostic testing done by a physician and /or ER and will not be lab confirmed for H1N1. **Schools should not depend on individual test results as the basis for routine decision making in the management of ILI.** Some individuals with ILI do not seek medical care and are not tested. In addition, some rapid tests may produce false positive and false negative results and turn-around time for influenza PCR test results may be several days. This season CDC recommends that influenza diagnostic testing be prioritized for certain groups including those hospitalized for influenza or those with chronic medical conditions where confirmation would help determine treatment. **Most patients with a clinical illness consistent with uncomplicated influenza who reside in an area where influenza viruses are circulating do not require diagnostic influenza testing for clinical management.** All ILI cases should be treated in the same manner in terms of exclusion, infection control and prevention regardless of whether it is lab confirmed H1N1 or not. This is particularly important for high risk groups such as children, pregnant women and people with chronic conditions where serious complications can result from influenza.

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Prevent. Promote. Protect.

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H1N1 circulated throughout the summer months when the seasonal flu was not active. Therefore, most people who tested positive for influenza A by a rapid test and had ILI symptoms consistent with influenza were assumed positive for H1N1, even though the result was not lab confirmed. Symptoms of seasonal and H1N1 flu are the same, and students should be excluded from school until they are fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications. People with chronic conditions that put them at high risk for complications of the flu, should be encouraged to consult their physician if symptoms develop or if they have been directly exposed to someone with a confirmed case of flu.

We do not recommend that a note be sent home to notify parents that a clinically diagnosed or lab confirmed case of influenza/H1N1 was reported to the school. Instead, you may wish to address their concerns by communicating with them about the widespread transmission of H1N1 in school settings and that more sickness is anticipated in the coming months. Inform them of steps they can take to minimize the risk of infection, such as seasonal and H1N1 flu shots, proper hand washing, covering their coughs and sneezes with a tissue, knowing the signs and symptoms of the flu, and staying home when sick so as not to infect others. Emphasize infection control measures that the school is taking to prevent and control illness, such as routinely cleaning areas that students and staff touch often.

CDC recommends the primary means to reduce spread of influenza in schools and child care programs should focus on early identification of ill students and staff, staying home when ill, and good cough and hand hygiene etiquette. **Decisions about school and child care program closure should be at the discretion of local authorities based on local considerations, including public concern and the impact of school or child care program absenteeism and staffing shortages. School closure should be the last option schools should consider when the school cannot function administratively.**

Please check our website at www.willcountyhealth.org and www.ready.illinois.gov for more information about H1N1. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at (815) 727-8481.

