

H1N1 Q&A's for Staff October 27, 2009

Q. How is the Board responding to H1N1?

The Board is working in cooperation with Windsor Essex County Health Unit. Board staff are in constant communication with health authorities in the region. We have been assured that they are very sensitive to our concerns regarding the operation of schools. The Board is ready and able to take whatever advice or action regional health authorities recommend.

Q. What are the symptoms of H1N1 and other influenza-like illness (ILI)?

The acute onset of respiratory symptoms with fever and cough **and** any 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.

The virus continues to resemble seasonal influenza with mild symptoms in the majority of cases.

Individuals exhibiting flu-like symptoms of sufficient severity that require medical attention should contact their health care provider or call Telehealth Ontario 24/7 line at 1-866-797-0000.

Q. Will Windsor Essex County Health Unit contact us if someone in our school has the H1N1?

Windsor Essex County Health Unit is not reporting individual confirmed cases. This is consistent with the World Health Organization. This is considered a virus that is in our communities. On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization raised the pandemic alert level to Phase 6. This phase is declared when there is evidence of sustained community transmission in more than one WHO region-indicating that a global pandemic is under way. (The declaration is based on the spread of the virus, **not the severity**).

Q. What action is to be taken in schools? What if a child/staff member has a confirmed case?

Windsor Essex County Health Unit does not confirm cases. Regardless of whether or not you have been informed that a student or staff member has/had H1N1:

1. letters are not being sent home for individual cases that have been brought to their attention by a parent, student, staff or community member;
2. schools will continue to cooperate as per daily routines;
3. thorough and effective routine cleaning and disinfecting practices are being followed;
4. soap dispensers and paper towels are checked throughout the day to ensure that they are "topped up";
5. the overall health of students and staff is being monitored;
6. students who are exhibiting influenza-like illness are separated from the rest of the school population until they can be picked up; and
7. students are reminded of the best practices as follows:

To stay healthy generally and prevent the spread of the influenza and other infections:

- Wash hands well and often with soap and warm water.

- Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough.
- Cough and sneeze into your sleeve or arm (not your hands).
- Avoid touching your eyes, mouth and nose.
- Contact your family doctor and stay at home if you are ill.
- Practice social distancing (minimizing contact with family members, not going out in public) while symptomatic.
- Stay home if you are ill and return only if you no longer have a fever and are feeling better.
- Keep doing what you normally do, **but stay home if you are ill.**

In addition, teachers can review the following hand washing video with students
<http://wm.stream.yrdsb.ca/lrs/Directors/handwashing.wmv>

Q. What steps should be taken if a staff member becomes sick at school?

If a staff member becomes ill, they are to follow the normal Human Resources practices. Staff that exhibit Influenza Like Illness (ILI) should stay home until they are well.

Q. What specific plans are in place in the schools?

Principals and school staff are monitoring the general health condition of students.

If students become ill or arrives ill:

1. They are to be separated from other children and supervised by staff or volunteers. However, staff cannot be required to supervise students that have been “separated”. Should principals find that they are unable to get a staff member or volunteer to supervise the student(s) that is ill, the supervision is to be done by the VP or Principal.
2. They rest in a designated area where they can be monitored, will not be in contact with the school population, have access to Alcohol-Based Hand Rub (ABHR), and given tissues to cover their mouth and nose **when coughing and sneezing**. If the designated area does contain a sink, then soap and paper towels should be provided and students should wash their hands with soap and water as this is still the single most important measure for preventing the spread of infections.
3. Principals make final determination as to whether or not parents need to be called.
4. If yes, office staff then call parents to pick up their child.
5. Parents are told by the principal that their child is to stay at home and return only if their child no longer has a fever and is feeling better.

Students are reminded of the importance of regular, thorough hand washing and good personal hygiene. Students and staff should avoid sharing of food, beverages and other personal items.

Materials have been posted on the portal under **Board Documents – Hand Washing**. Principals are to ensure that the hand washing posters (also found in the same area on the portal) are displayed prominently in washrooms and that students and staff are reminded to wash their hands frequently.

Q. Can I wear a mask at school to protect against contracting the H1N1 flu?

The Public Health Agency of Canada does not recommend the wearing of masks in school settings to protect against contracting the H1N1 flu virus. Evidence shows that this is not effective in preventing transmission of influenza in the general public. People often use masks incorrectly, or contaminate themselves when putting masks on and taking them off, which could actually increase the risk of infection. Therefore, **masks are not permitted**. We are concerned about the fear and panic that may result from the wearing of masks, especially among young children.

People who are sick should stay home and return only if you no longer have a fever and are feeling better.

Q. What if I'm called to pick up my child because s/he is sick?

Contact your supervisor to arrange coverage, but do not bring your child to the workplace.

Q. *I'm pregnant/have underlying health conditions/am immuno-suppressed and I'm afraid of contracting the virus. What can I do?*

Public health authorities advise that you are at no greater risk than the general population to contracting the virus. Therefore, you should take the usual precautions to prevent illness as stated above. Those who have suspected H1N1 virus infection should contact their doctor as soon as possible.

Those who are pregnant/have underlying health conditions/are immuno-suppressed should speak with their doctor as soon as possible if they develop a flu-like illness to find out what steps to take. If students/staff are sick, they should stay home and return only if they no longer have a fever and are feeling better.

H1N1 flu virus is in our community and can be contracted anywhere. Transfers to other schools do not afford greater protection. Windsor Essex County Health Unit is no longer confirming cases and the general community is not being tested for the virus.

Windsor Essex County Health Unit has stated that those who are well should go to work and school.

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

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

Q. *What if I can't get to my doctor right away to pick up the note, how quickly do I have to submit the note?*

Generally, where required, doctors' notes are expected during an absence or upon return. Supervisors' discretion may be applied under extenuating circumstances.

Q. *What if an employee's family member is ill? I was sick and now one of my family members is sick and I have to care for them, what do I claim?*

If an employee's family member is ill and requires that the employee care for them, employees should refer to their collective agreement and/or Board Policy and should also discuss with their Supervisor/Human Resources. Following these days, if the employee is still required to provide care for a family member, they should refer to their collective agreement. They may request an unpaid leave of absence. A doctor's note is required to support an unpaid leave.

Q. *What measures are custodians taking in schools?*

Thorough and effective routine cleaning and disinfecting practices are in effect in our schools and are supported by Windsor Essex County Health Unit. As per standard practice, custodians provide very thorough and effective cleaning and disinfecting of schools as part of their daily routine duties. These include cleaning surfaces that are high contact (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, throwing up).

Q. *Will the Board be providing hand sanitizers to school/workplaces?*

Staff, visitors, volunteers, etc. and students are able to wash their hands with soap and water in our schools and workplaces.

Alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) has been ordered and should arrive soon. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has provided information which states that “students with Influenza Like Illness should be encouraged to dispose of used tissue immediately and to practise hand hygiene using a 60-90% ABHR”. If the designated area does contain a sink, then soap and paper towels are provided and students should wash their hands with soap and water as this is still the single most important measure for preventing the spread of the infections.

Q. Will schools close?

School closures are not recommended at present by public health authorities. Any decision to close or modify school operations due to an illness outbreak will be made under the advice of Windsor Essex County Health Unit.

Q. What happens when a student/staff member/parent/community member says there is a case of H1N1 at my school?

This virus is in our community. Regardless of whether or not a student or employee has been given confirmation, the following standard practices continue:

- daily routine cleaning and disinfecting; and
- measures to prevent the spread of the influenza and other infections are reinforced.

Health information of individuals is protected by privacy law and may not be disclosed.

Q. Are drinking fountains being turned off?

NO. Regular practices and precautions are to be followed (i.e. students are being reminded to avoid touching the spout of drinking fountains).

As per standard practice, students should avoid sharing of food, beverages and other personal items.

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

As per standard practice, elementary breakfast programs and hot lunch programs are to continue under normal, diligent adult supervision.

Q. Will clubs and co-curricular activities be cancelled?

Co-curricular activities will continue.

Q. Will there be vaccines available for staff?

Windsor Essex County Health Unit has been monitoring the local H1N1 situation and working closely with other levels of government and various stakeholders, including the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board. Two flu vaccines are being developed against these viruses. The seasonal flu vaccine will be available later in the year, while the H1N1 flu vaccine is now available. Further information can be found on the Windsor Essex County Health Unit website.

Q. Where can I obtain more information about H1N1?

Contact Windsor Essex County Health Unit at **519-258-2146** or **1-800-265-5822** or www.wechealthunit.org. For H1N1 information in other languages, contact **Telehealth Ontario** at **1-866-797-0000**. Our Board website, www.wecdsb.on.ca has links to the latest information.