

MODULE 5 • SURVEILLANCE & REPORTING

Purpose

To establish a plan for influenza surveillance and ensure that there is a system in place for reporting illness to the Vermont Department of Health.

Pandemic Severity or Timing Issues

The type of surveillance and reporting needed for pandemic flu will vary depending on whether the risk for pandemic has increased in any part of the world — and certainly will change if the new pandemic flu strain is identified in the United States. Surveillance and reporting procedures will also be based on the severity of illness caused by the pandemic strain. Descriptions are provided below.

Planning Guidelines

- 1. Identify an individual to be responsible for influenza surveillance and reporting.** School nurses already report diseases to the Health Department, so their involvement is recommended.
- 2. Review information provided here on types of surveillance and reporting that may be needed under different conditions.**
 - Identify the different sources in your school for reporting information about absent students and staff.
 - Identify back-up personnel who could take on disease reporting if needed.
- 3. Determine how information about illness will be gathered and compiled.**
- 4. Share this plan with faculty and staff.**

Recommended Disease Surveillance Activities —

No Pandemic

- **Annual Influenza season (no pandemic occurring):** School closure is not normally recommended to stop flu transmission. The decision to close schools is sometimes made by school administrators for practical reasons (e.g. high levels of absences among students or staff). Higher than expected numbers of absent students or staff due to influenza-like illness (fever, cough or sore throat, body aches) should be reported to your district Health Department office. This information helps health officials have a better understanding of the impact that influenza is having on people around the state.
- **New strain of flu that is transmitted easily from person to person in parts of the world, but not in the U.S.:** When this occurs, it will greatly increase the risk of this new strain of flu causing a world-wide outbreak (pandemic). The Vermont Department of Health will provide regular updates to schools and to the public regarding the status of the international outbreaks, and implications for the U.S. and for Vermont.

During this time:

- ✓ Students and staff should stay home if they have flu symptoms.
- ✓ Anyone with severe symptoms should consult their health care provider.
- ✓ Anyone who becomes ill after an exposure to a suspected new strain of flu should seek medical attention, and their illness should be reported to the Department of Health.
- ✓ Families or staff concerned that they may have been exposed to someone ill with the new flu strain should be referred to the Department of Health. An information line will be set up to take calls.
- ✓ In times of heightened concern such as this, it is easy for rumors to get started. While the Health Department cannot disclose confidential information about individuals, epidemiologists can investigate reports of illness to help determine if there is a public health concern, and regularly report to the public.

Surveillance during a pandemic —

School nurses and administration will be provided with specific instructions regarding the type of surveillance and reporting that should be done in the school.

Examples of what might be expected are given here.

- **Less severe pandemic: heightened surveillance and reporting:** The decision to keep schools open — or to close for a short period — may be made at the school or school district level, in consultation with the Vermont Department of Health. To guide these decisions, it will be important to know both numbers/percentages of student/staff absent, and the reason for these absences.

During this time:

- ✓ Educate staff on symptoms of flu and encourage them to stay home if ill with flu symptoms — and call school nurse/health aide to report their symptoms.
- ✓ Change voice recordings for all “student sick” lines to the following:
“Please leave the name of your child, their teacher’s name and the symptoms your child is having so we can keep track of illness trends in our school”.
- ✓ When possible, ask these questions when students/staff call in sick:
 - “What are the student’s symptoms?”
 - “Have you seen the doctor?”
 - “When did the illness begin?”
 - “Did the doctor provide a diagnosis?”
- ✓ Have the person designated as attendance officer complete a *Student Signs & Symptoms Log* based on the information collected through phone calls, and give to nurse or health aides by mid-morning.
- ✓ The Department of Health will provide surveillance guidance and a surveillance report template for school use. The district Health Department office may request aggregate information about school absences.
- ✓ Designated health staff at the school will monitor the occurrence of unscheduled absences and potential trends in illness or symptoms among staff and students.

- ✓ School nurses or health aides will maintain a similar log for students who are at school but come to the office due to illness
- **More severe pandemic: detecting and reporting possible early cases:**
During a more severe pandemic, the goal will be to close schools *before* there is transmission within the facility, or even within the community.

Possible early cases in a community will be identified through evaluation of an individual's symptoms, along with their likelihood of exposure (e.g. travel to an area experiencing pandemic influenza cases, or contact with an ill individual).

Health care providers will have the primary responsibility to identify and report early illnesses that may prove to be pandemic flu. However, schools can play an important role in providing information to students, families and staff, referring ill individuals for appropriate evaluation, and reporting the suspected illness to the Health Department.

If Schools Close —

- **Surveillance and disease reporting when schools are closed:**
 - ✓ When transmission of a more severe strain of pandemic influenza has been identified in your region, school closure will be recommended to control the spread of illness.
 - ✓ As part of the school's coordination and command structure, schools should appoint a lead contact with the Department of Health.
 - ✓ Depending on the scope of the outbreak, school staff may be able to provide different types of support to the students and families in their school community. For example, schools may have the capacity to monitor the number of families (of students and staff) that have ill household members. This can be done through telephone or e-mail, without risk of disease transmission. For schools that have this capacity, the Health Department will provide procedures for reporting this information, which could be valuable in determining if families need specific types of assistance, and in understanding when the level of illness in the community is waning.
- **Surveillance and disease reporting when schools reopen:**
The Department of Health will permit schools to re-open when influenza transmission has either ended, or declined significantly within the region. This will be an important time to continue surveillance for possible new cases of flu.

Schools will be asked to document any new cases of influenza-like illness and report them to the Department of Health.

Specific guidance and recommendations will be provided at that time.