

## **Module 7 • Recovery**

### **Purpose**

To prepare a plan for transitioning staff and students back to their normal routines after pandemic flu transmission has ended in the community.

### **Recommendations for Re-opening Schools**

The Vermont Department of Health will recommend when to re-open schools. This recommendation will be based on evidence that spread of influenza in the region has greatly slowed, or has ended. This could happen either due to the availability of a new, effective vaccine, or because a large portion of the population has had and recovered from flu.

The Health Department will also give guidance about how to continue surveillance and reporting of new suspected cases of influenza.

Questions may come up from families and staff about whether there is a need for any special environmental cleaning before children return to school. Unless there has been some special use of the school building during the pandemic (such as using parts of the building to care for the sick) there will be no need for any building disinfection.

Even in such a case, influenza viruses do not live for long on surfaces in the environment. Transmission of flu is very closely related to person-to-person contact, not contact with surfaces. The Department of Health will give specific instructions to schools if special environmental cleaning is needed.

Students and staff returning to school after a pandemic have undergone significant stress and disruption of their lives. In a severe pandemic, many may have lost family or friends. Schools will have an important role in make sure that emotional and psychological supports are in place — at school or through appropriate referrals.

Individuals recovering from influenza may experience great fatigue for an extended period of time before returning to their normal energy level. This could affect attendance and/or ability to participate fully in school activities.

## Planning Guidelines

### Pre-planning for recovery:

- ✓ Ensure your school has identified health and grief management resources. (e.g. local community mental health agency)
- ✓ Provide training for school staff regarding grief support and possible health problems to expect (e.g. local community mental health agency).

### Recovery

- ✓ Mobilize school health team/crisis team to be ready to offer emotional-psychological support for students or staff. If there has been loss of life in the school community, establish a site or “safe room” for counseling and support services to be provided.
- ✓ Hold faculty/staff meeting to provide information on the impact of pandemic flu in the community and activities that may help students recover, signs and symptoms to look out for, and safe room function and location. Announce counseling and support services that are available to staff.
- ✓ Identify students, families and staff who may need long-term mental health support or intervention. Develop school and community resources to provide these services.
- ✓ Provide rest places for those who tire easily.
- ✓ Be aware of the possibility of physical and energy limitations in those who are recovering from influenza. Individuals may need school-related adjustments such as altered schedules, or referral for medical evaluation.
- ✓ Make educational materials available to staff, and to families for their students, on topics such as how to support recovery from pandemic flu, common symptoms of loss and grief, and constructive ways to cope with stress.
- ✓ If your school has an Employee Assistance Program, consider establishing a working relationship with the program.
- ✓ Re-establish routine learning process as soon as possible to aid in recovery, and promote a sense of normalcy.
- ✓ Monitor the effects of long-term stress on caregivers such as office staff, school nurses, teachers, aides, school counselors, and other crisis team members.
- ✓ Modify work roles and responsibilities or add volunteer support staff as needed.

- ✓ Document “lessons learned” and incorporate them into plan revisions and trainings.
- ✓ Plan a response for the anniversary period several months in advance, including a needs assessment to identify students at continued risk.