

SECTION V: GUIDANCE FOR PANDEMIC FLU SCHOOL PREPAREDNESS

This section is divided into eight modules that are designed to guide the preparedness planning process. Each provides guidance, checklists, resources and/or tools about a specific area of pandemic flu preparedness.

- Module 1 Organizational Command & Control**
- Module 2 Promoting Healthy Habits**
- Module 3 Communicating about Pandemic**
- Module 4 Maintaining Essential Services
& Continuity of Student Education**
- Module 5 Disease Surveillance & Reporting**
- Module 6 Modified Human Resource Policies**
- Module 7 Recovering from Pandemic**

MODULE 1 • ORGANIZATIONAL COMMAND & CONTROL

Purpose

To establish organizational command and control during an influenza pandemic. Completing this key activity of pandemic flu planning will help maintain the operation of a school during an influenza pandemic, using the same coordination and command structure that is used for other emergency or crisis events.

Pandemic Severity or Timing

Planning for organizational command and control should take into consideration that the number of individuals sick from influenza may fluctuate across the course of the pandemic. The response, in terms of command and control, may depend upon the timing of the pandemic in relation to school breaks and vacations.

Planning Guidelines

1. Prepare a command & control organizational chart that –

- ❑ Outlines the chain of command
- ❑ Identifies two or three alternates for each member of the command staff
- ❑ Designates people who have authority to make key decisions, e.g. school closing
- ❑ Identifies people who have access to essential supplies and vital records
- ❑ Identifies the person who has final authority
- ❑ Identifies the person who is responsible for releasing information to families, community members and the media during a crisis
- ❑ Identifies the person who is responsible for coordinating with all of the agencies that have responded to the crisis
- ❑ Identifies the person who manages student and staff care during a crisis. This includes physical (food and water), medical (CPR and first aid), and mental health (psychological services) needs, as well as student release.
- ❑ Identifies the person who manages the supply and staffing needs of the situation.
- ❑ Identifies the person who is responsible for keeping track of administrative issues, including payroll and other critical administrative issues.
- ❑ Identifies the person who is responsible for meeting the needs of special populations (including language minorities) during a pandemic.

Each member of the command staff must know what their role is in an emergency, who they report to, who they are responsible for, and for which role they may be the alternate. Everyone must also understand how authority is delegated, what the limits are to that authority, when alternate command staff assume control and how notification takes place.

RESOURCE:

FEMA/Emergency Management Institute, Introduction to Incident Command System (ICS100)
<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is100.asp>

2. Form a planning committee, or charge an existing school health committee with the role of pandemic planning. Members may include —

- District Superintendent, Principal
- Business/Finance Director
- Human Resources Director
- School Nurse
- Transportation Director
- Facilities or Maintenance Manager
- Food/Supplies Director
- Curriculum Director
- Parent-Teacher Association Representative
- Staff or Teacher Representative
- Athletic Director
- Guidance Dept./Counselor
- Special Education Director
- School Resource Officer
- School Board Representative

3. Appoint a pandemic influenza coordinator. This person could be a member of the planning committee (#2). Responsibilities —

- Make sure that the school pandemic flu readiness plan is completed.
- Make sure all departments/stakeholders are represented on committee.
- Facilitate pandemic influenza planning committee meetings.
- Serve as point of contact with the Department of Education and Department of Health on pandemic influenza information, issues and planning updates.
- Serve as source for accurate pandemic influenza information for staff.
- Serve as point of contact for parents/stakeholders on pandemic response.

4. Complete a risk assessment. (Risk Assessment Worksheet follows.)

RISK ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

Use this worksheet to conduct a risk assessment to help determine the impact of pandemic influenza on your school. Modify the questions to fit your school's particular needs or situation.

Issues	Status
What functions would you strive to maintain during a pandemic?	
What is the minimum number of staff required to maintain these functions?	
Numbers of employees absent at 15%, 30%, or 40% absentee rates:	
Do you have at least two alternates who know how to perform these functions?	
How many employees currently care for dependents at home (children, disabled family members, or seniors)? <i>This may be used to estimate how many people may be unable to work or other quarantine/containment measures are implemented.</i>	
Number of current employees with special needs — <i>Those who rely on public transportation</i> <i>Those who have disabilities</i> <i>Those who do not speak English (translator required)</i>	
How will the disruption of utilities impact your school? <i>Water, electricity, telecommunications, waste-disposal</i>	
How long can your school function: <i>Without re-supply</i> <i>With limited staff</i> <i>If the building was closed</i>	
What is the impact if your school is forced to close? <i>Loss in revenue</i> <i>Effect on students and parents</i> <i>Effect on employees</i> <i>Insurance coverage</i>	
Where do your staff, students and parents most often travel to/from? <i>To areas that currently have cases of avian or pandemic flu?</i> <i>To densely-populated cities?</i> <i>Nationally or Internationally?</i>	

5. Identify essential tasks and personnel.

- Identify essential tasks (those tasks that must be done even during a pandemic). Examples:
 - Administration
 - Facility maintenance
 - Special education/services for special populations
 - Food service for vulnerable children/community members
 - Continuity of education

- Make sure there are personnel assigned to each of the essential tasks (those jobs that must be done even during a pandemic).

- Identify at least two alternates for each key command position, in case the primary person assigned is unable to perform his or her duties.

MODULE 2 • PROMOTING HEALTHY HABITS

Purpose

To help schools promote healthy habits — and to prepare faculty, staff, students and their families to control the spread of infection.

Pandemic Severity or Timing Issues

Before a pandemic, schools will benefit from finding ways to teach and support the health habits described in the educational section below. As the threat of pandemic flu increases, schools will need to reinforce stricter adherence to these behaviors, and may be advised by the Health Department to take additional measures to control the spread of illness.

Planning Guidelines

Commonsense steps to help establish good health habits should be promoted in the school setting for all — students, teachers, and staff. Good health behaviors that become habits before a flu pandemic will be valuable methods of infection control when a pandemic occurs. In addition to promoting general health education and behaviors — such as general hygiene, eating a balanced diet, exercising daily, and getting sufficient rest — schools can take an active role in teaching methods to stop the spread of germs, and supporting those behaviors in the school setting.

Pre-pandemic Action Steps

1. Promote seasonal influenza vaccinations.

One healthy habit to encourage in the school setting is seasonal influenza vaccination. Annual influenza vaccination is especially recommended for people age 50 and older, and those who are at special risk for complications from influenza, such as pregnant women and adults or children who have chronic health problems (asthma, diabetes, cardiac problems, etc). Flu vaccination is also recommended for people who have household or other close contact with people at higher risk for complications from influenza.

2. Promote good health manners to keep illness from spreading —

Teach students and staff to wash hands often and well.

- Teach *when* to wash hands:
 - ✓ upon arrival to the classroom
 - ✓ before group activities (e.g., playing with objects that are shared in younger age groups)
 - ✓ before meal or snack time
 - ✓ after using the bathroom
 - ✓ after sneezing, coughing, or touching the mouth or nose)

- Teach *how* to wash hands:
 - ✓ Use soap and water
 - ✓ Rub hands together thoroughly, and wash between fingers
 - ✓ Wash for at least 20 seconds (the length of time it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice)
- Provide hand sanitizer, with a minimum of 60% alcohol, for when soap and running water are not available.
 - ✓ If hands are visibly soiled, soap and water should be used.

3. Teach students and staff to practice “cough” or “respiratory” etiquette.

- Cover cough and sneezes with disposable tissues, or hands, or turn face and step away from others.
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer after coughing/sneezing into hands or handling tissue.
- When someone is ill with respiratory symptoms, keep at least 3 feet between that person and others.

4. Set expectation that students and staff will stay home when they are sick.

- Support individuals who are ill in staying home.
- Encourage those who become ill at school to go home.

5. Use posters to remind students and staff of healthy behaviors.

- Keep several different versions of posters in supply, and rotate to continue attracting attention. (Sample posters included in School Action Kit.)
- Post throughout school in strategic locations:
 - ✓ Bathrooms
 - ✓ Cafeteria
 - ✓ Gymnasium
 - ✓ Music room
 - ✓ Library
 - ✓ Staff lounge

6. Maintain inventory of essential supplies to support healthy behaviors:

- Soap in soap dispensers
- Paper towels
- Tissues
- Trash bags
- Disinfectant for cleaning surfaces
- Alcohol-based sanitizers
 - ✓ With at least 60% alcohol content
 - ✓ If permitted by your school’s *Health, Life and Safety code*

- Periodically inspect and maintain soap dispensers in all bathrooms.
- Make hand sanitizer available in critical areas where a sink is not easily accessible (e.g. fitness center, locker rooms, kitchen, allied health classrooms, etc.)
- Maintain supplies as described above. Inventory supplies frequently, schedule re-supplies.

7. Review and revise policies and procedures to make sure they support compliance with infection control —

- Review/revise policies and procedures for employees.
 - ✓ Include information on hand washing/hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, related required training (e.g. bloodborne pathogen training).
 - ✓ Focus attention on staff who are in closest contact with students (teachers, paraprofessionals, nurses, food service workers, staff involved in physical education and sports activities).

- Review/revise sick leave policy and procedures for teachers, staff and students.
 - ✓ Provide information (flyer) that describes the difference between flu and the common cold. (Sample included in School Action Kit.)
 - ✓ Individuals should not be in school or at school activities when they have flu-like symptoms — a temperature of 100.4°F or 38° C or more, and any of the following: cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches.
 - ✓ Individuals showing flu-like symptoms will be sent home.
 - ✓ Consider placing a mask on a coughing child or staff member while waiting for arrangements to be made for the person to leave.
 - ✓ When possible, designate an area or room where the ill person can be separated from others by at least 3 feet.

- Review/revise custodial procedures for cleaning.
 - ✓ Increase cleaning frequency during peak seasons of respiratory illness.
 - ✓ Use hospital-grade disinfectant according to manufacturer's instructions to clean several times a day "high-touch" areas (such as drinking faucet handles, door knobs, push bars, hand rails, sink and toilet contact areas).

Special Pandemic Action Steps

1. During the pre-pandemic period —

- Encourage individuals within the school who work on health-related issues (e.g., school nurse, health educator, pandemic planning committee, etc.) to develop a school-wide project to promote healthy behaviors.

This can be best accomplished by engaging teachers and staff in advance, providing education as described below, providing necessary supplies, and promoting routines and policies that help control spread of illness in the school setting.

These efforts will help during seasonal influenza outbreaks, but will be essential behaviors during a pandemic.

2. At heightened threat of pandemic —

- Inform teachers, staff and families about the status of the pandemic, and the school's response plan — including measures that will be taken to control spread of illness. Provide similar information to students in age-appropriate language and format.

The main focus of these efforts will be to keep people who are ill with symptoms of flu out of the school environment, and to encourage people who are healthy to strictly follow infection control practices.

3. During less severe pandemic, without school closure recommendations —

- Inform teachers, staff, and families that the school will be strictly exclude anyone who is ill with flu-like illness (fever with cough or sore throat). Specific guidance will be provided to schools at the time, but is likely to include these directives:
 - ✓ Do not come to school when experiencing these symptoms.
 - ✓ If you have developed these symptoms, do not return to school until you have had no fever for at least 24 hours without the use of medication that suppresses fever.
 - ✓ Anyone developing flu symptoms at school will be separated from the classroom and sent home as soon as possible.
 - ✓ If extracurricular activities such as sports or clubs haven't been cancelled, ensure that no one with flu like symptoms attends or participates.
 - ✓ For those attending school, reinforce infection control behaviors: covering coughs and sneezes and frequent hand washing.
 - ✓ Remind children to not share food or items such as water bottles.
 - ✓ Ensure adequate supplies needed for hygienic practices.

- ✓ Increase frequency of environmental cleaning of “high-touch” areas, such as door knobs, handrails, water fountains, etc.
- ✓ Consider all possible ways to increase social distance during activities that happen in the school setting.
- ✓ Possible measures to increase social distancing:
 - Limit unnecessary close contact and group activities such as assemblies.
 - When possible, keep children in the same groups. Limiting intermixing of classes and groups can limit disease transmission.
 - Consider staggering hours of school attendance or allowing staff that do not have student contact to work from home
 - Additional recommendations for increasing social distance in the school setting will be issued by the Health Department as needed.

4. During less severe pandemic, without school closure recommendations —

The Health Department will provide specific recommendations if the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) should be considered for use by staff, faculty and students. Staff most likely to deal with individuals who develop flu symptoms at school could benefit from the use of PPE.

Staff such as school nurses and those who provide close personal support to individuals should have access to the following:

- ❑ Surgical masks - a supply of flat procedure type masks
- ❑ Gloves - as in standard precautions
- ❑ Goggles - school nurses could consider having a pair of goggles available should he/she have the need

For staff or students who develop fever or respiratory symptoms while at school:

- ❑ Provide a separate, well-ventilated space for the individual to stay in until he/she can be taken home
- ❑ Give surgical masks/procedure masks to wear until they have left the school building

5. After the Pandemic —

Remind students and staff to maintain good infection control practices in case some people are still infectious.

- ❑ Maintain consistent hygiene practices.
- ❑ Keep social distancing strategies in place until no one is infectious.
- ❑ Disinfect surfaces as needed.

MODULE 3 • COMMUNICATING DURING PANDEMIC

Purpose

To establish two-way communication networks and systems with teachers, staff, students, parents and community stakeholders — and prepare to communicate effectively about pandemic and your school community.

Pandemic Severity or Timing Issues

Before a pandemic, schools will benefit from having crisis and emergency risk communication plans in place that will serve to keep everyone informed before, during and after an event such as pandemic.

Early and ongoing communication — along with phased, credible, accurate, useful and school-specific information as the event progresses — will help everyone make decisions and take actions that are in the best interests of the community.

Planning Guidelines

The Vermont Department of Health will provide extensive information in the event of pandemic to schools — and will rely upon schools to use their communication plans to reach their own community. Communication plans for any crisis event should include pre-event planning, event response, and recovery actions.

During any crisis event, it is important for leaders to show empathy and demonstrate dedication, communicate the facts of the event as well as what is not known, explain the process for finding out answers, give people positive actions they can take, and point to credible sources for more information.

Pre-Pandemic Action Steps

1. **Appoint a Public Information Officer (PIO)** and back-up to serve as the main source of information for the school community.
2. **Keep emergency contact lists** for key people and groups up to date with daytime and after-hours information.

Examples of Key Groups:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers/Staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Police |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parents/PTO | <input type="checkbox"/> Fire |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health Department | <input type="checkbox"/> EMS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Suppliers | <input type="checkbox"/> Union Representatives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hospitals | |
3. **Bookmark credible sources of information** and gather resources to share before, during and after a pandemic. (See resources listed below.)

Examples of information to share:

- Basic facts about human influenza, seasonal and pandemic
 - Basic facts about avian influenza (bird flu)
 - Current status of pandemic flu
 - What to expect during a pandemic
 - Non-medical measures to prevent spread of illness
 - Information about hand washing, cover your cough, stay home when you're sick, etc. (See Module 2 • Promoting Healthy Habits)
 - Where to get information during a pandemic
 - How to prepare for pandemic at home and work
 - Information about vaccine and antivirals
 - How to take care of sick people at home
 - What to do if you or your child is sick
4. **Write an internal communication plan**, including what information will be communicated before, during and after a pandemic, and what methods will be used to share information.

Examples of information to be shared:

- Status of the pandemic
- Infection control policies
- How illness will be monitored
- Status of the school (open or closed)
- Updates or changes to Human Resources policies
- Job reassignments
- Plans for continuity of Student Learning (status)

Consider different scenarios for providing information to teachers/staff:

- If school is open
- If school is closed
- During working hours
- After hours
- When information must be shared quickly

Consider various methods for communicating:

- E-mail
- Telephone information line
- Website
- Automated phone calls/messages
- Newsletter
- Posters
- Local radio and TV stations
- Scrolling text on cable access stations

5. Write an **external communication plan**, including what will be communicated before, during and after a pandemic, and what methods will be used.

Identify how you will communicate information that must be shared immediately:

- E-mail
- Telephone information line
- Website
- Automated phone calls/messages
- Newsletter
- Posters
- Local radio stations
- Scrolling text on cable access stations

Identify how you will communicate other information:

- Posters
- Flyers distributed by staff, parents, students or groups
- Letters home
- Incorporating information into classes
- Refer to websites — school, state or federal
- Student news programs or newspapers
- Host in-service by school nurse, Health Department, etc.
- Town hall meeting
- FAQs on cafeteria lunch menus

Identify methods for ensuring messages are understandable for everyone, including people with special needs. Consider:

- Reading level - use plain, simple English.
- Non-English speaking – what resources can you draw on to translate information for those who do not understand English?
- How will you reach others with special needs (low vision, deaf, etc.)

See Sample Parent Letters —

#1 – Prevention

#2 – First Bird Flu Case in the U.S.

Pandemic Action Steps — Planning Guidelines

1. **Activate communication plan.** Inform the community about the status of the school (open or closed), response actions that the school is taking, and actions people can take.

See Sample Parent Letters —

#3 – Pandemic Flu in the U.S.

#4 – School Closing

#5 – School Re-Opens

RESOURCES:

For information about the status of pandemic in Vermont, and state response and resources:

Vermont Department of Health

www.healthvermont.gov

Vermont Department of Education

www.education.vermont.gov

For information about the status of pandemic in the U.S. and the world, and federal response and resources:

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

www.pandemicflu.gov

For information on crisis communication, on-line risk communication course, pandemic flu message maps and handbook for journalists:

www.pandemicflu.gov/news/rcommunication.html

For a list of national hotlines:

www.pandemicflu.gov/faq/hotlines.html

For frequently asked questions about pandemic:

www.pandemicflu.gov/faq/index.html

For planning checklists, including schools and day cares:

www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/school/index.html

SAMPLE PARENT LETTER #1

Prevention Letter

Use this letter to help prepare parents or caregivers for pandemic flu — before there are human pandemic flu or bird flu cases in the U.S.

* * *

Dear Parents,

This letter will help your family get ready for a flu pandemic that could make many people sick.

A pandemic is when people all around the world are getting sick from the same disease. Pandemics happen when there is a new virus that can easily spread from person to person, making many people sick.

At this time, scientists and health experts are concerned about the bird flu virus (H5N1) that has caused illness and deaths in people in other parts of the world. Right now the bird flu virus doesn't spread easily from one person to another — but it is possible that it will mutate (change) to a form that can easily spread from person to person.

It's also possible that another new flu virus will turn up. There have been three flu pandemics in the past 100 years, and most experts believe that another pandemic could happen at any time.

The Vermont Department of Health and (INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL) wants people to take actions to protect themselves against pandemic flu NOW:

- **If you're sick, stay home from work or school.** Keep sick children home from school. Stay away from other people until you're better.
- **Wash your hands well and often.** Teach your children to do the same. Wash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. That's about as long as it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song twice.
- **If you can't wash with soap and water,** use a hand sanitizer. Gels, rubs and hand wipes all work well, as long as they have at least 60% alcohol. (Read the label.)
- **Teach children** to keep their hands away from their face and don't touch mouth, nose or eyes.
- **Cover your cough.** Teach your children to do the same. Cough into the inside of your elbow, or into a tissue — not your hands!

- **Throw away used tissues** or hand sanitizer wipes. Teach your children to throw and then wash hands.

There is a checklist with this letter to help families get ready for a flu pandemic. This information can also help your family get ready for any kind of emergency.

Stay tuned and be prepared! You can get more information at www.pandemicflu.gov, www.healthvermont.gov or (school website).

Thank you for your help with keeping our children and our schools healthy.

Sincerely,

(NAME OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR)

SAMPLE PARENT LETTER #2

First Bird Flu Case in the U.S.

Even though the confirmation of a bird infected with avian/bird flu (H5N1 or another type) does not mean there is a pandemic, you can expect people to be confused and concerned when this happens.

Use this letter to help parents and guardians understand what this event means.

* * *

Dear Parents,

Birds that are infected with a very serious avian influenza (bird flu) virus have been identified in the United States.

You may have heard that this “bird flu” virus has caused illness and death in many parts of the world. It’s important for you to know that most people who got sick were in close contact with infected birds.

Even though this bird flu is now in the United States, it does NOT mean that a lot of people here will get sick. At this time, there are no known human cases of bird flu in the United States.

There are simple things we can do to protect ourselves. Make sure your children understand and all family members take these common sense actions:

- **Do not touch sick or dead birds.**
- **If you MUST pick up a sick or dead bird** (for example, if one is on your doorstep), never use your bare hands. Pick up the bird with a shovel, or wear gloves. Wash your hands right away after taking off your gloves.
- **Do not touch bird droppings.** If you do, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- **If you pick up droppings,** use a shovel, “pooper scooper” or gloves. Never use your bare hands.
- **Try to stay away from dirt or grass that is soiled** with bird droppings.
- **Teach children to always wash their hands** after playing outside.
- **Take off shoes or other footwear** before coming in after being outside where there are bird droppings.

You may know that some scientists and health experts are worried that the bird flu virus might some day cause an influenza *pandemic* (illness around the world) in humans. To cause a pandemic, the virus would have to mutate (change) to a form that is easily spread from one person to another. Bird flu does not do that right now. Bird flu is hard for people to catch.

It makes sense to stay tuned and be prepared. There is a checklist with this letter to help families get ready for an influenza pandemic. This will help you prepare for any emergency.

You can also get more information at www.pandemicflu.gov, www.healthvermont.gov or (school website).

Thank you for your help with keeping our children and our schools healthy.

Sincerely,

(NAME OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR)

SAMPLE PARENT LETTER #3

Pandemic Flu in the U.S.

Use this letter to let parents or caregivers know that there has been a report of pandemic flu in the U.S., but schools are still open.

* * *

Dear Parents,

This letter will give you information about a new flu outbreak in the United States.

Every year, some people get sick with the flu during the fall and winter months. This year there is a new flu virus that is making many people sick. Because so many people are getting sick around the world with this new flu virus, health officials call it “pandemic” flu.

The Vermont Department of Health has confirmed that this new outbreak of illness in the U.S. is pandemic flu.

Pandemic flu spreads quickly from person to person and causes more serious illness around the world than the regular, or “seasonal” flu.

For now, school will stay open — At this time, the Health Department tells us that students who are not ill can safely come to school.

If the pandemic flu continues to spread in the U.S. and if it causes severe illness, Vermont schools may be closed for an extended period of time. The purpose of closing schools is to keep children at home and away from others — to slow the spread of flu from person to person.

Now is the time to plan for caring for children at home in case this happens.

Keep sick children home — Right now, we ask you to keep sick children home to keep illness from spreading to others. Any child who is sick and at school will be sent home.

If school closes — All of us at (NAME OF SCHOOL) have been preparing for this possibility. If Vermont schools are going to close, we will let you know right away. We are reviewing our plans and procedures for managing the school in the safest way possible during this time. This includes procedures for closing school but continuing essential functions.

We will also be giving to students, teachers and staff more information about pandemic flu and how to help stop illness from spreading: cover your cough, wash your hands, stay home if you're sick, and staying away from others who are sick.

Actions you can take —

- **If you're sick, stay home** from work or school. Keep sick children home from school. Keep sick people away from people who are not sick. Stay away from other people until you're better.
- **Tell your school nurse** or administrator what symptoms your child has (fever, cough, muscle aches, etc.) so they can watch for other students with the same symptoms. Call to keep your child's health care provider informed.
- **Stay away from public places** like shopping malls, movie theaters, sports arenas or other places where there are large groups of people. This will help slow the spread of infection.
- **If people in your home are sick** with the flu and cannot see a healthcare provider, care for them at home — Give plenty of liquids (clear fluids with electrolytes). Use ibuprofen (e.g. Advil) or acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol) for adults with fever, sore throat and muscle aches. **DO NOT** give aspirin to children or teens. If the ill person is having difficulty breathing or is getting worse, call a healthcare provider.
- **Wash your hands well and often.** Make sure your children do the same. Wash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. That's about as long as it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song twice.
- **If you can't wash with soap and water**, use a hand sanitizer. Gels, rubs and hand wipes all work well, as long as they have at least 60% alcohol. (Read the label.)
- **Remind children** to keep their hands away from their face and don't touch mouth, nose or eyes.
- **Cover your cough.** Teach your children to do the same. Cough into the inside of your elbow, or into a tissue — not your hands!
- **Throw away used tissues** or hand sanitizer wipes. Teach your children to throw and then wash hands.
- **Don't share** water bottles, utensils, cups, etc. with others.
- **Disinfect hard surfaces** within three feet of anyone who is ill. Use isopropyl alcohol or a solution made of one ounce bleach to one gallon of water. An EPA-registered disinfecting product can also be used as directed.

If you have questions, call your school nurse or healthcare provider. You can call the school information line (INSERT TEL #). You can also go to the school website (INSERT URL).

It's important to keep informed about what's happening. You can get more information from the Vermont Department of Education at www.education.vermont.gov or the Vermont Department of Health at www.healthvermont.gov

The federal government keeps current information for individuals and families at www.pandemicflu.gov

Sincerely,

(NAME OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR)

SAMPLE PARENT LETTER #4

School Closing

Use this letter to let parents or caregivers know that there is a pandemic flu outbreak and Vermont schools are closing.

* * *

Dear Parents,

Because of pandemic flu in the United States, health officials have strongly recommended that all schools in our county be closed.

This letter is to notify you that schools are immediately closed until further notice. Children should stay home.

We know that many students and their families are very sick. This is a very hard difficult time for our community and especially for those who are ill. We are working very closely with the Vermont Department of Health and following their recommendations to do all we can to help keep illness from spreading.

The purpose of closing schools is to keep children at home and away from others — to limit the spread of flu from person to person. Schools may be closed for long time — up to 12 weeks.

Because the flu is easily spread from person to person, it is not safe for large groups of people to gather together. During this time, both children and adults should stay away from other people and groups as much as possible. Do not gather in crowded locations such as shopping malls, movie theaters, sports arenas, community centers, etc. or homes.

Actions you can take —

- **If you're sick, stay home** from work or school. Keep sick children home from school. Keep sick people away from people who are not sick. Stay away from other people until you're better.
- **Stay away from public places** like shopping malls, movie theaters, sports arenas or other places where there are large groups of people. This will help slow the spread of infection.
- **If people in your home are sick** with the flu and cannot see a healthcare provider, care for them at home — Give plenty of liquids (clear fluids with electrolytes). Use ibuprofen (e.g. Advil) or acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol) for adults with fever, sore throat and muscle aches. **DO NOT** give aspirin to children

or teens. If the ill person is having difficulty breathing or is getting worse, call a healthcare provider.

- **Wash your hands well and often.** Make sure your children do the same. Wash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. That's about as long as it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song twice.
- **If you can't wash with soap and water,** use a hand sanitizer. Gels, rubs and hand wipes all work well, as long as they have at least 60% alcohol. (Read the label.)
- **Remind children** to keep their hands away from their face and don't touch mouth, nose or eyes.
- **Cover your cough.** Teach your children to do the same. Cough into the inside of your elbow, or into a tissue — not your hands!
- **Throw away used tissues** or hand sanitizer wipes. Teach your children to throw and then wash hands.
- **Don't share** water bottles, utensils, cups, etc. with others.
- **Disinfect hard surfaces** within three feet of anyone who is ill. Use isopropyl alcohol or a solution made of one ounce bleach to one gallon of water. An EPA-registered disinfecting product can also be used as directed.

If you have questions, call your school nurse or healthcare provider. You can call the school information line (INSERT TEL #). You can also go to the school website (INSERT UR).

It's important to keep informed about what's happening. You can get more information from the Vermont Department of Education at www.education.vermont.gov or the Vermont Department of Health at www.healthvermont.gov

The federal government keeps current information for individuals and families at www.pandemicflu.gov

Sincerely,

(NAME OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR)

SAMPLE PARENT LETTER #5

School Re-opens

Use this letter to let parents or caregivers know that pandemic flu illness is waning, and schools are now re-opening.

* * *

Dear Parents,

Because there is much less pandemic flu illness in our community, the Vermont Department of Health has informed us that students may now return to class.

(NAME OF SCHOOL) will open again on (INSERT DATE).

Although schools are re-opening, it is important to know that pandemic flu outbreaks sometimes happen in two or three “waves.” This means that there may be a period of time when there are a lot of people sick with flu (first wave), followed by a period of time when there are fewer people sick, followed by a period of time when there is lots of illness again (second wave). This patten may repeat.

Because there may be another wave of illness still to come, we must continue to track illness and take action to keep illness from spreading. If many more people get sick, schools may close again.

We’ll continue to keep you informed about what’s happening in our school and in our state.

There are still some people who are sick from the flu virus. Because flu can still be spread easily from person to person, we ask you to keep children who are sick at home.

Any child who is sick and at school will be sent home.

We ask you to keep taking actions to keep germs from spreading —

- **If you’re sick, stay home** from work or school. Keep sick children home from school. Keep sick people away from people who are not sick. Stay away from other people until you’re better.
- **Stay away from public places** like shopping malls, movie theaters, sports arenas or other places where there are large groups of people. This will help slow the spread of infection.
- **If people in your home are sick** with the flu and cannot see a healthcare provider, care for them at home — Give plenty of liquids (clear fluids with electrolytes). Use ibuprofen (e.g. Advil) or acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol) for

adults with fever, sore throat and muscle aches. DO NOT give aspirin to children or teens. If the ill person is having difficulty breathing or is getting worse, call a healthcare provider.

- **Wash your hands well and often.** Make sure your children do the same. Wash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. That's about as long as it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song twice.
- **If you can't wash with soap and water,** use a hand sanitizer. Gels, rubs and hand wipes all work well, as long as they have at least 60% alcohol. (Read the label.)
- **Remind children** to keep their hands away from their face and don't touch mouth, nose or eyes.
- **Cover your cough.** Teach your children to do the same. Cough into the inside of your elbow, or into a tissue — not your hands!
- **Throw away used tissues** or hand sanitizer wipes. Teach your children to throw and then wash hands.
- **Don't share** water bottles, utensils, cups, etc. with others.
- **Disinfect hard surfaces** within three feet of anyone who is ill. Use isopropyl alcohol or a solution made of one ounce bleach to one gallon of water. An EPA-registered disinfecting product can also be used as directed.

If you have questions, call your school nurse or healthcare provider. You can call the school information line (INSERT TEL #). You can also go to the school website (INSERT URL).

It's important to keep informed about what's happening. You can get more information from the Vermont Department of Education at www.education.vermont.gov or the Vermont Department of Health at www.healthvermont.gov

The federal government keeps current information for individuals and families at www.pandemicflu.gov

Sincerely,

(NAME OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR)

MODULE 4 • MAINTAINING ESSENTIAL SERVICES & CONTINUITY OF STUDENT EDUCATION

Purpose

To identify critical functions, services, personnel and supplies, and plan for continuity of essential school operations during a pandemic.

Because a high number of staff absences and limited supplies are to be expected, emergency operational plans should specify how essential services will be provided and critical functions performed — and should identify the staff and back-up staff necessary for continuity of operations.

Pandemic Severity or Timing Issues

A variety of factors will affect the ability of a school to maintain essential services and provide continuity of education during a pandemic, as well as the type and extent of services provided. During a less severe pandemic, schools will be open, but there will be higher number of absences among students, teachers and staff.

Planning Guidelines

6. Identify the functions and services that will be necessary for continuity of essential operations.

Examples:

- Administration
- Finance / Payroll
- Information / Computer Services
- Facility Maintenance
- Food Services
- Transportation
- Safety / Security
- Student Education
- Special Education
- Supporting Community Activities
- Coordination of Volunteers

7. Create an action plan to address how each critical function or service will be performed or provided. For each, consider:

- ❑ What supplies will be needed? Include plans to address how supply chains can be maintained.
- ❑ Develop job action sheets or checklists to describe key activities for each function or service as an aid for backup staff who may not perform the job regularly.
- ❑ Develop a human resource plan that assigns primary and backup staff for each function or service.
- ❑ Incorporate into the human resource plan ways to enable adult social distancing. (See Module 2 • Promoting Healthy Habits.)

If Schools are Closed —

If schools are closed during a more severe pandemic, continued learning opportunities could be a valuable activity for children at home. The type of educational opportunities a school could support may vary by school, by school district, and by considerations unique to the community.

Depending on the timing of the pandemic, accommodations or adaptations — such as extending or consolidating vacation breaks, or commencing school early, may be viable options instead of, or in addition to, continuity of learning plans.

National Recommendations

The U.S. Department of Education recommends continuing to provide educational services to students during a severe pandemic to the greatest extent that is practical. Possibilities range from providing content such as booklists, assignments, lesson plans — to the complete delivery of remote classroom education (e.g. distance learning).

For more information on the national approach to continuity of education, go to [pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov), or directly to:

<http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/pandemic/guidance/pan-flu-guidance.pdf>

Information on continuity of education is located on pages 6 and 7.

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.

MODULE 6 • MODIFIED HUMAN RESOURCE POLICIES

Purpose

To develop workplace policies that define, document and allow reasonable and appropriate absences from the workplace during a pandemic, reassign staff roles in the event of high absences, and enable social distancing of adults.

Planning Guidelines

The Family & Medical Leave Act protects eligible employees who are incapacitated by a serious health condition, as may be the case with the flu, or who are needed to care for covered family members who are incapacitated by a serious health condition.

The U. S. Department of Labor and other federal agencies are currently reviewing federal statutes and regulations that may affect employers and employees during the unique circumstance where the nation experiences a severe influenza pandemic. Decisions have not yet been made as to whether any changes are needed.

As an overall matter, employers should be guided in their relationship with their employees not only by federal employment law, but by their own employee handbooks, manuals, and contracts (including bargaining agreements), and by any applicable state or local laws.

1. Create a plan to address human resource issues, and educate faculty and staff about these modifications.

- ❑ Extended absence when employees use their accrued leave
- ❑ Documentation and approval
 - ✓ How will absences due to illness be reported?
 - ✓ Determine documentation requirements for compensation of leave days or for FMLA taking into consideration that medical resources will be overtaxed during a pandemic.
- ❑ Reassignment of staff roles (*if an organization experiences high absenteeism, staff may need to be reassigned.*)
 - ✓ Training for reassigned roles
- ❑ Facility closure

- ✓ Will your organization continue to pay employees if it has to temporarily close and, if so, how and for how long?
- ✓ What sources are in place for funding payroll?
- Enforcement of absence, due to confirmed illness
 - ✓ What is the policy for sending an ill person home?
- Alternate scheduling policies (*When possible, limiting contact between people may help to reduce the spread of infection*)
 - ✓ Are employees able to do any of their work from home?
 - ✓ Are employees allowed to flex their hours?

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.