

**pH1N1 Questions & Answers for Parents & Students**  
**Thursday, November 5, 2009**

***Q: How are the board and public health keeping track of large numbers of cases at schools?***

A. Since late September 2009, school office staff have been reporting school absenteeism data to a secure Halton Region Health Dept website. This data assists the Health Dept with its surveillance of the illness in the community. The Halton Health Dept shares this absenteeism data with the school board. Through this data, the Board is able to monitor all work sites for student absences due to influenza-like illness above 2% levels. Beginning Thursday, November 5, 2009 and weekly thereafter, this absenteeism data will be posted on the board website.

***Q. If my child is away sick do I have to call the school each day?***

A. Yes. Parents are asked to report daily if their child is not attending school. This is an important part of our “safe arrival” program.

***Q. Why is the school collecting information about my child’s symptoms?***

A. At the request of the Halton Region Health Dept, the message on all school’s answering machine requests that parents confirm whether their child has *Influenza Like Illness* (ILI) symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat etc). Providing this information is voluntary.

School office staff submit this data (number of students absent with ILI symptoms) on a secure website to assist with the Halton Region Health Department with its surveillance of illness in the community.

***Q. Are we planning to close schools because of pH1N1?***

A. The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and Halton Region Health Dept, continue to not recommend the widespread proactive closure of schools. Since the pH1N1 virus is widely circulation in the community, this measure may not be effective in preventing transmission as students and staff who may be exposed in other community settings. The benefits of keeping schools open currently outweighs the risk of transmission in these settings.

***Q: When there was a case at the school last year (May and June 2009) we were told about it. What has changed?***

A. Confirmation of the pH1N1 illness is done through a medical laboratory test requested by a physician. This testing is limited to those individuals at high risk for complications of the flu. As such, there is much less testing now being done.

The school/location will not be informed of site-specific cases of pH1N1 by the board, or by Halton Region Health Dept. Halton Region Health Dept will communicate with boards and schools about the status of increased pH1N1 activity that requires additional public health intervention.

***Q. What can be done to avoid getting the flu?***

A. In addition to getting the pH1N1 vaccine, everyone should continue to practice basic infection control such as hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, keeping hands away from eyes, nose and mouth, disinfecting touch surfaces (door knobs, hand rails, counters etc), staying home when ill and not returning to work or school until fully recovered.

***Q. Are schools emphasizing these prevention strategies with students?***

A. Since early May 2009, staff have emphasized hygiene practices with students. We have requested that all elementary administrators schedule frequent hand washing for students and staff (with soap and water) into their school's daily routine. Secondary school students and staff are encouraged to do the same.

***Q. Is the school board providing hand-sanitizer in schools?***

A. In May and June 2009 the Halton District School Board began supplying portable classrooms with "Soapopular" - a non-alcohol based hand-sanitizer. This fall, new recommendations from the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and Ministry of Education required schools to place alcohol based hand-sanitizer (ABHS) in additional locations (computer rooms, libraries, and school offices).

***Q. Why has the board provided alcohol-based hand sanitizer? Isn't it flammable?***

A. Halton Region Health Dept recommends, when using hand sanitizers, that alcohol-based hand sanitizers (ABHS) are the most effective. (Note: Some schools may still be using up their supplies of non-alcohol based hand-sanitizer distributed earlier this year.) The alcohol based hand sanitizer is flammable and we therefore consulted with fire officials to determine appropriate places for its use. The use of ABHS needs to be supervised – which is why they are located in the school office, library, portables and computer rooms.

***Q. Can students bring alcohol-based hand sanitizer to school?***

A. Yes, students may bring a small bottle of alcohol-based hand sanitizer for their personal use. Due to environmental sensitivities of staff and students, we ask that only "unscented" products be sent to school.

***Q. What if my child gets sick at school?***

A. Firstly, check with your school to make sure they have your most up-to-date contact information. Generally, if a student feels ill at school, the student will be taken to the office and the parent/guardian called to pick up the child as quickly as they can. If possible, and the school site has the facilities, the child would wait away from other children and in a supervised area until picked up by the parent.

***Q: The water in the bathroom at my children's school is not hot. Is that a problem?***

A. Health officials say the temperature of the water is not the issue - it is how long the hands are under the water and that proper hand washing practices are followed.

***Q. What are the board's cleaning procedures to prevent PH1N1 transmission?***

A. Last year, the board initiated heightened cleaning procedures. These procedures have been reinforced this fall with custodial staff and comply with the provincial pH1N1 guidelines. High-touch surfaces like doorknobs, push plates and hand rails are cleaned regularly during the day using a neutral disinfectant.

***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 at this time.

***Q. Will sports team travel to compete at other schools?***

A. Yes, sports teams will continue to participate in games against other schools. Coaches will continue to emphasize flu prevention precautions, such as frequent hand washing. As always, common water bottles are not to be used by athletes.

***Q. What should happen with musical instruments that are shared?***

A. A limited number of schools have a shared musical instrument program. Schools should have a process ensuring that instruments are appropriately sanitized between uses. A new operating procedure will provide clear direction on this process.

**Q: Where can I find out more about pH1N1?**

A. If you have questions about symptoms or risks associated with influenza, you can visit the Halton Region website [www.halton.ca](http://www.halton.ca) or call 905-825-6000, between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday to Friday.

Of course, you can talk to your doctor or Telehealth 1-866-797-0000. To find out more about what the board is doing, refer to the resources and updates posted on the Board's website ([www.hdsb.ca](http://www.hdsb.ca)).

Some communities have set up flu assessment centres to give the public easier access to flu services and to reduce pressure on hospital emergency rooms and doctors' offices. For more information about these centres, please visit the website below, provided by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Please share this information widely within your organization.

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ccom/flu/h1n1/public/assess\\_clinics.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ccom/flu/h1n1/public/assess_clinics.aspx)