

Beginning in April 2009, the State of Texas began responding to the outbreak of the H1N1 virus. When this strand was introduced there was limited knowledge of the severity which prompted the Department of State Health Services to recommend school closures in those areas believed to be affected by H1N1. With new information and research it is evident that this flu strand contains moderate symptoms that resemble those in seasonal flu and school closures will no longer serve as the preferred method of limiting transmission. Due to the potential of outbreaks this school year, in addition to seasonal flu and other emergency concerns (i.e. hurricanes and or flooding), we encourage districts to review their emergency preparedness plans. TEA suggests the following information pertaining to H1N1 this school year.

District Level Staff should consider:

- In anticipation of district or campus closure, preset local or campus “trigger points” for absenteeism recommended closures and review of the waiver procedures on the Texas Education Agency website. Local districts may consider teacher absenteeism, staff student ratios, student absenteeism or local ability to sustain educational capacity. Waiver applications for both missed instructional days and low attendance are available at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/waivers/waiverapps.html>. For more information about waivers, please contact the Waivers Division at (512) 463-5917 or by email at mike.peebles@tea.state.tx.us.
- Effective communication plans district wide and between the community and the district. These entities should include the local/regional health official, county judge, emergency personnel, volunteer organizations to assist parents, and local/regional food banks (pantry) for assistance with breakfast and lunch supplements for students. Additional information can be found on the Texas Department of Agriculture website http://www.squaremeals.org/fn/render/parent/channel/0,1253,2348_2380_29978_0,00.html#29978
- Review and utilization of the resources linked to Department of State Health Services, Centers for Disease Control and Instruction and Curriculum links from TEA.
- Review of the School District (K-12) Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist available at <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/school/schoolchecklist.html>

Campus Administrators should consider:

- Increasing supplies and awareness for infection control including use of hand soap, hand sanitizers, tissues etc. Downloadable H1N1 prevention posters in English and Spanish are available at <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/swineflu/swineflu.pdf> and <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/swineflu/3cs-sp.shtm>
- School staff should routinely clean areas that students and staff touch often with the cleaners they typically use. Special cleaning with bleach and other non-detergent-based cleaners is not necessary.
- Holding community meetings to review procedures for limiting transmission of the flu (seasonal and H1N1), protocol for staying home when ill and any other pertinent information.

- Review the resources from the Department of State Health Services www.texasflu.org, and additional resources at www.tea.state.tx.us

Parents are encouraged to:

- Monitor their children those with flu-like illness should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines.
- Review the resources from the Department of State Health Services www.texasflu.org, and additional resources at www.tea.state.tx.us

With adequate planning, a potentially challenging flu season this fall should not cause a significant disruption to our Texas schools. As always, the health and safety of Texas students is our number one priority