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Pandemic Influenza Planning Guide for Iowa Schools January 2006

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This pandemic Influenza Guidance for schools was developed by the Iowa Department of Public Health to assist schools in developing their own pandemic influenza plans. It is intended as a guide, listing important actions schools may need to undertake when preparing their plans. Continued actions may need to be done to ensure that pandemic influenza plans cover the unique needs of each school.

Background

According to the World Health Organization (WHO),

“An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus appears against which the human population has no immunity, resulting in several simultaneous epidemics worldwide with enormous numbers of deaths and illness. With the increase in global transport and communications, as well as urbanization and overcrowded conditions, epidemics due to the new influenza virus are likely to quickly take hold around the world.”

Influenza is a highly contagious respiratory virus that is responsible for annual epidemics in the United States and other countries. Each year an average of 200,000 people are hospitalized and 36,000 die in the U.S. from influenza infection or a secondary complication. During an influenza pandemic the level of illness and death from influenza will likely increase dramatically worldwide.

The impact of an influenza pandemic on the local economy and business processes could be devastating. It is likely that 15-35% of Iowa's population will be affected. There is a potential for high levels of illness and death, as well as significant disruption to society and our economy, making planning for the next influenza pandemic imperative.

Assumptions

Predicted spread and severity:

- Over a several month period, illness rates in Iowa's population: 15-35%
- Global spread in: 3 months
- Vaccine availability: 6 months after initial outbreak
- Anti-viral treatment: Likely to be in short supply and may not be effective

Potential Effects:

- Large percentages of the population may be unable to work for days to weeks during the pandemic.
- Diminished numbers of people and expertise available.
- Diminished emergency and essential services – fire, police, and medical.
- Potential for school closures

School Effects:

- Large numbers of staff absent, difficult to maintain school operations
- Loss of services from suppliers (e.g. food service, other essential products)
- Large numbers of student absenteeism

Guide Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to assist in managing the impact of an influenza pandemic on schools based on two main strategies:

- Reducing spread of the virus within school facilities; and
- Sustaining educational functions

This guide provides recommendations for schools to develop a pandemic plan including the following:

- Communication to schools from external sources regarding the pandemic virus, and internal communications within the school.
- Activities to reduce the spread of the virus
 - Reducing risk of infected persons (students, staff, visitors) entering the facility
 - Student spacing (reduce person to person interactions) i.e. postponing school events or activities. (also called “social distancing”)
 - Cleaning and disinfecting of facilities.
 - Educating parents/students/staff to address concerns.
 - Handling students/employees who become ill at school and those who may have been exposed to the virus at school.
- Prevention/Treatment, related information regarding provision of and use of
 - Influenza vaccine
 - Anti-viral medication
 - Antibiotics
- Maintenance of Essential School Functions
 - Identification of essential staff and functions.
 - Planning for absenteeism of students and staff.
 - Communication with parents/guardians/students/staff.
 - Education for employees/students/parents/guardians.

Communication

Communication for Schools

- The most effective approach to the pandemic influenza threat is to align your policies and procedures with the local public health agencies and the Iowa Department of Public Health for Pandemic Influenza recommendations in order to coordinate appropriate response and to avoid causing unnecessary concern. Key: partner closely with the local public health agency and establish communication mechanisms.
- A primary communication channel will be the public health website at <http://www.idph.state.ia.us/pandemic>. Specific information for schools will also be made available both through this website and through your local public health agency; local communication plans should be instituted.
- Communicate and educate faculty/staff/students/parents/guardians about effective hygiene habits before any outbreaks occur to protect everyone now (promotion of frequent hand washing, cough/sneeze etiquette).

- Each school should identify a chain of command and establish back ups to include an appropriate spokesperson.

Communication Plans Should Include:

Communications to Employees

- Communications to employees should be managed per your individual School Emergency Plan. Advise the employees in advance where to find up-to-date and reliable information.
- Communications may be via email, Internet and Intranet website, telephone, or postal services.
- Links to appropriate health or external sites should be utilized. .
- Educational communications should be provided to encourage employees to acquire and maintain personal, regular healthcare services.
- Educational communications should be provided regarding school policies for employee's compensation and sick leave absences that may be unique to a pandemic.

Communications to Students/Parents/Guardians

- Disseminate information about the district/school's pandemic preparedness and response plan, once developed.
- Anticipate the potential fear and anxiety of students and families as a result of rumors and misinformation and plan rapid and accurate communications accordingly
- Disseminate information for parents about the potential impact of a pandemic on school functioning (arranging for childcare in the event of school closure, continuity of instruction)
- The school should assure that all communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate and meet the needs of all students/families with special needs.

Reducing the Spread of the Virus

- Appoint a pandemic committee and/or team. This individual or team should have defined roles and ensures that preparedness and pandemic response planning occurs. The team should identify the school authorities responsible for activating the pandemic influenza plan.
- Develop an Incident Command System within the school to manage the Pandemic Influenza Plan. Collaborate with you local Emergency Manager and then test the linkage with the local Incident Command System.
- All planning activities should include input from labor/administration/employee/student/parent representatives as appropriate.
- The pandemic coordinator and/or team should review collaborate in the local emergency response and public health plans. Review internal communicable

disease policies and procedures, compose and maintain the Pandemic Influenza Plan for the school.

- Consider provision of sufficient and accessible infection prevention supplies (soap, alcohol based hand hygiene products, tissues and appropriate receptacles).
- Consider developing a process with Local Public Health a surveillance mechanism to report a substantial increase in absenteeism among students and faculty.
- Upon notification that a pandemic is occurring, the pandemic coordinator and/or team for each facility should do the following:
 - o Set up prominent notices at all entry points to facility, advising staff, students and visitors not to enter if they have symptoms of influenza.
 - o Educate employees, students, parents and visitors on how to stop the spread of the virus and notices may be placed around the school (including entrances, notice boards, meeting rooms and restrooms). Notices should contain information regarding hand hygiene, covering coughs and sneezes, and student spacing.
 - o Ensure adequate supplies of tissues, hand sanitizing gels, soap and water and cleaning supplies are available for employees and students.
 - o The pandemic coordinator should ensure that employee, student and parent education includes a pandemic influenza fact sheet containing information regarding stopping the spread of the virus and performing effective student spacing.
 - o Shared work areas such as desktops, tables, door knobs, stair rails, etc. should be cleaned with a disinfectant at least daily, more often if possible.
 - o Consider and prepare for how/if the school may function with 30% of the workforce absent.
 - o Consider alternatives such as staggered school times, changes in bussing and telecommunications.
 - o Consider establishing policies and procedures for implementing containment measures (canceling sports events and other mass gatherings).
 - o Consider developing alternative procedures to assure continuity of instruction, distance learning methods (web-based, telephone trees, mailed lessons and assignments, instruction via local radio or TV stations) in the event of large numbers of absenteeism or school closure.
 - o As a last resort and in consultation with public health officials, dependent upon the significance of the outbreak, considering if/when the school will close, as school closures may actually increase disease transmission if not orchestrated correctly.
 - o Education, communication and guidance to the community that closing schools is a last resort and is only effective for disease containment if the staff and students are directed to stay at home during the school closure.

Student Spacing (social distancing)

Student spacing refers distancing individuals and strategies to reduce the spread of the virus between people.

- Education on student spacing should be distributed to all staff, students and parents.
- Student spacing strategies may include:
 - Space students' desks three (3) feet apart, in small pods or clusters
 - Discourage prolonged congregation in hallways, lunch rooms etc.
 - Staggered school times
 - Staggered bus routes, so there are fewer people on each route
 - Limit group activities and interaction between classes
 - Canceling gym class, choir or other school activities that place individuals in close proximity.

School Cleaning

- Disinfecting of shared work areas, counters, railings, door knobs and stair wells should be performed more frequently during the influenza pandemic.
- Filters of the air conditioning systems should be cleaned and changed frequently.
- Telephones should not be shared.
- Specialized cleaning solutions are not essential. Standard cleaning products are adequate (including soap and water) and can disinfect surfaces so most important is the frequency of cleaning.
- Where operationally possible, during the day increase ventilation to the facility to decrease spread of disease and following each school day the school may be thoroughly ventilated and cleaned (either opening all doors and windows or turning up air conditioning/heating systems).
- Details of cleaning solutions can be found in the fact sheets on the IDPH web site. www.idph.state.ia.us/pandemic

Educating Students/Staff/Parents to Eliminate Concern

It is likely there will be anxiety regarding the pandemic influenza and this may contribute to increased absenteeism and/or increased distress to staff,

- Suggested methods to address this:
 - Educate those involved in your preparedness efforts.
 - As more information becomes available, provide timely updates.
 - During the pandemic, continue to educate staff, students and parents on the progress of the pandemic and its effects.
 - As needed, work with local resources and local public health to assure support mechanisms are readily available for example: mental health, social services and faith based resources.

Managing Illness in Staff, Students or visitors

- Pandemic coordinators should post information on what to do if people get sick while at school.

- Educate staff and students regarding symptoms of illness.
- If a person becomes ill, or if someone observes that another person is exhibiting symptoms of influenza at work/school; make sure the ill person leaves the school as soon as possible.
- Consider establishing policies for transporting ill students.
- The person should be encouraged to seek medical care and report back to pandemic coordinator if influenza is likely.
- Educate staff and parents/students regarding standard baselines for staying home and when they may return to school.

Treatment

Influenza Vaccine

Public health officials will make the best use of available vaccine and will inform schools and the public on how any available vaccine will be used. It may take six months or more to manufacture the vaccine after the pandemic begins.

- Meanwhile, encourage employees and students to obtain the annual seasonal influenza vaccines.
- The Iowa Department of Public Health and the Center for Disease Control will provide advice on priority groups for pandemic influenza immunization.

Anti-Viral Medication

Antiviral medications may play an integral role in the treatment and prevention of pandemic influenza; however, their efficacy against a pandemic strain of influenza is currently unknown. Unlike the influenza vaccine, limited amounts of certain antiviral medications are already available, though there may be barriers in attempting to use them as a treatment and prevention tool in the event of pandemic influenza.

- The Iowa Department of Public Health will provide recommendations of the use of anti-viral medication.
- The pandemic coordinator should check the Iowa Department of Public Health's website for the latest information on the use of anti-viral medications and recommendations

Continuity of Operations

Your school's administrative team should ensure that core functions, people and skills have been identified and that strategies are in place to manage these prior to the pandemic.

Identify a process for maintaining the operations of the central office (including budget, payroll, and ongoing communications with parents and students)

School Pandemic Plan Maintenance

- The plan should be reviewed and revised annually.
- The plan should be exercised and tested annually.
- Exercise results should be incorporated in to plans.
- Exercise and share your plan with your partners such as
 - o Your insurers
 - o Your health plans
 - o Local hospitals and healthcare providers
 - o Local public health agency
 - o Neighboring schools