

H1N1 Facts

What is H1N1?

- There is currently a pandemic of H1N1 influenza.
- This is a different strain than what we see during the seasonal flu season.
- It causes flu-like symptoms including: cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and fever.

What is a pandemic?

- A pandemic means that a disease has spread to multiple countries in the world.
- A pandemic must meet these criteria:
 - It is caused by a germ that no one has had
 - The disease must be able to infect humans
 - It must cause illness or death
 - It must spread easily from person to person

How is the seasonal flu and H1N1 different?

- Influenza happens every year in nearly every country. It spreads through a population for a few months and will disappear or move to another country. Influenza usually occurs in the fall and winter months and usually affects older adults the most.
- H1N1 influenza can strike at any time of the year. It may cause illness in any person and in the past has caused illness in healthy young and middle-aged people. It will probably circulate several times around the world or in “waves”.

Why should we be concerned about the spread of flu in school?

- Students who get sick can easily pass it to each other during school and bring it home to their families.
- So far, the largest number of cases has been in people between the ages of 5 and 24 years old.
- Kids share many items and are in close contact with each other at school, making it extremely easy to exchange germs.

Can the virus live on surfaces, such as computer keyboards?

- Yes, flu viruses may be spread when a person touches droplets left by coughs and sneezes on hard surfaces (such as desks or door knobs) or objects (such as keyboards or pens) and then touches his or her mouth or nose.
- Clean surfaces and items which are more likely to have frequent hand contact, using standard cleaning agents.

Will schools close if there are cases in a school?

- School officials, the Polk County Health Department and the Iowa Department of Education work together to make the decision to close a school. The decision will consider:
 - The number and severity of cases
 - If the amount of staff and students absent due to illness affects the ability to operate the school safely

Why did the school closure guidelines from last spring change?

- Last spring schools were instructed to close if they had a positive H1N1 case. This experience showed us that the potential benefits of school closure were often outweighed by the negatives, such as kids being home alone, kids missing meals, and parents having to miss work.
- This fall we will focus on proven strategies, such as hand washing and staying home when sick, to help reduce the spread of germs in our school.

What is the school doing to prepare?

- School districts in Polk County prepared a pandemic plan several years ago. This plan outlines basic steps the school can take that correspond with the level of spread seen throughout the country.
- We will be in constant communication with the Polk County Health Department for new recommendation and strategies.

Action steps for parents and schools

- These strategies are proven to stop the spread of germs:
 - Stay home when you are sick! It doesn't matter how severe or mild your symptoms are, you still have germs in your body that can be passed to others.
 - Wash your hands! Wash them often with warm water and soap, scrubbing for 20 seconds.
 - Clean surfaces of common areas and items