



Schools and Flu: Frequently Asked Questions

What has the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH) done to prepare our county's residents and schools for pandemic H1N1 flu?

Since pandemic H1N1 flu (commonly called "swine flu") first appeared in late April 2009, LACDPH has worked to limit the spread of the virus in communities by conducting influenza surveillance, promoting prevention messages, and preparing for the provision of influenza vaccine. Information about pandemic H1N1 flu is continually updated on the LACDPH web site at www.publichealth.lacounty.gov and regularly shared with community partners. LACDPH has been active in partnering with schools: providing informational support, monitoring and responding to outbreaks, and assisting with infection control. Schools can access many of our resources on our dedicated school webpage at www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/schools.

If my child gets sick, should I ask my doctor to test her for pandemic H1N1 flu?

Most people with flu-like illness will get better without the need to see a doctor or to be tested for flu. It is important to keep our medical offices, and especially our emergency rooms and hospitals, free to care for people who are seriously ill. LACDPH is reserving H1N1 strain testing for only those with serious illness where knowing whether the person has pandemic H1N1 influenza will be important for their treatment. People who are more likely to become seriously ill from flu should contact their doctor if they become sick. This includes: pregnant women, people with weakened immune systems, and those with chronic illnesses (like diabetes) and especially those with heart and respiratory issues like asthma, heart and/or lung disease. While most people that get the flu will get better without the need to see a doctor or get special treatment, there are some "emergency warning signs" that you should watch out for since it may show the need for urgent medical care:

In children watch out for:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being overly irritable
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Fever with a rash or fever that continues for 3 or more days
- If symptoms improve, but then return and get worse

In adults watch out for:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Should I buy special antiviral medicines for pandemic H1N1 flu?

Most people do not need special medicine for flu and will get better on their own with rest and fluids. Antiviral medications should only be taken under the guidance of a medical doctor. Do NOT give aspirin to children to treat flu-like illness.

There are children sick with flu at my child's school, should I be concerned? Should I keep my child out of school?

No. Single cases of illness, even outbreaks of illness, are common and happen all the time *everywhere*, not just at schools. Schools are not the only place where germs can spread—it would be impossible to expect to never be around other people who might be ill. Instead, it is important that we all do our part to limit the spread of germs in our communities by: getting your flu shot, teaching and rewarding good habits like washing your hands and covering your coughs, and staying home when sick.



If my child is sick, when can she go back to school? Do I need to get a doctor's note or medical clearance for her to return?

Students and staff with flu-like illness can return 24 hours after their fever has stopped (and without the use of fever reducing medicines). A doctor's note is not medically necessary to return. A mild cough may sometimes continue and should not be reason to refuse readmission.

Does a school need to disinfect or conduct special cleaning to stop the spread of flu?

No. Schools do not need to disinfect surfaces, clean out air ducts, turn off air conditioning or heating systems, or conduct any special cleaning beyond their normal standard practices. While germs, like the flu virus, can sometimes spread when a person touches something that's contaminated and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth, it is not practical or possible to clean surfaces continuously. Even if a campus was scrubbed from top to bottom, once children and staff re-enter, surfaces are contaminated all over again! The best way to avoid getting the flu does not include special cleaning procedures. Instead, it is especially important to wash your hands, avoid touching your face (eyes, nose, and mouth) and get your flu shot.

Why are there two flu vaccines being offered this fall?

This fall there are two flu vaccines: a seasonal flu vaccine and one to protect you against pandemic H1N1 flu. LACDPH urges **everyone** to get vaccinated against seasonal flu to help reduce illness in our communities. But because pandemic H1N1 flu emerged after the seasonal flu vaccine was made, and because it is mostly affecting different age groups (those younger than 50), there is a separate vaccine to protect against pandemic H1N1 flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend the following groups get the pandemic H1N1 vaccine:

- Pregnant women
- People 6 months to 24 years of age
- People who live with or care for children under 6 months
- People aged 25-64 at higher risk for complications from flu (i.e., heart or respiratory disease, or weakened immune systems)
- Healthcare/emergency workers with direct patient contact

Last spring my child had the flu. Does she still need to be vaccinated against H1N1?

Yes. Unless your child was actually tested to know she had the specific pandemic H1N1 flu strain (and that is very unlikely), we have no way of knowing if her illness was truly due to pandemic H1N1 flu. Plus, there are many other illnesses that feel just like the flu, but are **not** the flu and will not provide protection or immunity. So even if you think your child had the flu already, it is best to still have her vaccinated to ensure she is protected.

Public Health came to my child's school and tested my child for flu. Should I wait until Public Health clears my child and says it is OK for her to go back to school? Should I call Public Health to get the test results?

No. Sometimes when there seems to be a significant increase in illness on a campus (for **any** illness), Public Health might come by to help. Testing is sometimes important to help determine the cause of the illness since this might change our infection control recommendations. The testing that was conducted on your child's campus was not done to diagnose your child but to get a better understanding of what illnesses are circulating. As described above, unless otherwise directed, your child can return to school 24 hours after her fever has gone away as long as she is not taking medicines to reduce her fever.

- ★ For more information on flu, visit our website at: www.publichealth.lacounty.gov
- ★ Take our free on-line training class about flu: it's fast, fun, and contains lots of information specific to schools about flu! www.laschoolhealth.com
- ★ Register to receive **Influenza Watch**; a free emailed newsletter that provides updates of flu activity in LA County. To register, email fluwatch@listserv.ladhs.org