

EDUCATION BULLETIN / INFLUENZA A (H1N1)

TO: School boards, CEGEPs, universities and private teaching institutions

DATE: September 23, 2009

SUBJECT: Pregnant students in the schools, monitoring absenteeism and collaboration on the use of school premises during the vaccination campaign

Pregnant students in the schools

The Influenza A (H1N1) virus has been circulating in Québec since April 2009. Although most of the individuals affected have not had serious symptoms, severe complications have developed in some people, particularly pregnant women. The vast majority of these complications occurred during the third trimester and nearly all of the women (91.7%) recovered fully. Regrettably, there were two deaths. Still, pregnant women are not more likely to catch Influenza A (H1N1) than the rest of the population. The symptoms of Influenza A (H1N1) are similar to those of the seasonal flu: fever and cough along with at least one of the following symptoms: headache, sore throat, muscle aches and extreme fatigue.

For more information, please see the brochure *Influenza A (H1N1)—What you need to know, what you need to do—Protecting yourself, protecting others*, at:

<http://msssa4.msss.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/publication.nsf/4b1768b3f849519c852568fd0061480d/b672938b05492166852575b7006071c1?OpenDocument>.

Pregnant students should take the following precautions:

- Hand washing is the most important preventive measure. Insofar as possible, pregnant students should avoid attending gatherings where asymptomatic infected individuals may be found. If they have to frequent public places and gatherings, they should, if possible, maintain a distance of two to three metres from those around them.
- Pregnant students who exhibit one or more flu symptoms should immediately see a doctor, who can propose a course of treatment to be administered as soon as possible.

Should a pregnant student come into contact with a person who is already ill, she should monitor herself for the appearance of flu symptoms and quickly consult a doctor should any occur.

In Québec, the *Act respecting Occupational health and safety* stipulates that a pregnant worker may be re-assigned to tasks that do not present a danger for her or her unborn child. Should this prove impossible, she must be given preventive leave with financial compensation. This provision of the Act, which led to the development of the program *Pour une maternité sans danger*, (For a safe maternity experience, in French only) also known under the name *Retrait préventif de la travailleuse enceinte ou qui allaite*, is intended to ensure that pregnant or breastfeeding women can maintain their employment without risk to their health. The Commission de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CSST) administers *Pour une maternité sans danger*. This

does not apply to pregnant students or women who must do an internship in an educational institution.

Educational institutions are invited to find solutions that apply to pregnant students in order to minimize the impact of these recommendations on their academic life.

Monitoring absenteeism

In order to keep abreast of changes in the transmission of the Influenza A (H1N1) virus and to quickly identify breakouts in educational institutions, school administrators must be vigilant in monitoring changes in rates of absenteeism and notify the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) of all rates of absenteeism above 10% that may be related to the presence of flu-like symptoms or any unusual situation. Each educational institution must be able to quantify or describe instances of absenteeism among students, teachers and non-teaching staff.

Following such a notification, MELS must be advised of absenteeism rates on a daily basis so that it can keep track of the situation. Both the initial notification and follow-up of absenteeism must be directed, for the moment, to the nearest MELS regional office.

MELS is putting the final touches on an e-form that schools will be able to use, starting several weeks from now, to directly transmit their data on absenteeism. In the upcoming weeks, each educational institution will receive an e-mail relating to this topic.

Colleges and universities will receive details on the transmission of information relating to rates of absenteeism when they are notified about the e-form to be used for monitoring them, given that monitoring in colleges and universities is different from that in elementary and secondary schools.

Collaboration on the use of school premises during the vaccination campaign

Regional public health agencies are currently identifying sites to be used for this fall's vaccination campaign. School organizations or educational institutions may be called upon to provide health care authorities with premises in which to carry out this campaign.

However, the arrangements that school organizations and educational institutions reach with regional public health authorities must be such that the use of school premises has a minimal impact on students' schooling.

The loan of educational institutions' premises for the vaccination campaign is in keeping with the collaboration requested of all Québec public bodies in the struggle against the pandemic. In this context, regional public health agencies must not be billed for the use of school premises.

For all general information pertaining to Influenza A (H1N1), please contact Services Québec at 1-877-644-4545. You can also obtain additional information by consulting the Web site of Pandémie Québec at:

<http://www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/news/news.shtml>.

For all other information pertaining to Influenza A (H1N1), please contact your nearest MELS regional office.