

## EDUCATION BULLETIN INFLUENZA A (H1N1) VIRUS

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

**DATE :** August 19, 2009

**SUBJECT:** Back to school in the context of the Influenza A (H1N1) virus

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On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared a pandemic in the wake of the global propagation of the Influenza A (H1N1) virus. Up to now, however, this flu has remained non-life-threatening in the vast majority of cases.

In light of the current situation in Québec, the Direction générale de la santé publique (department of public health) recommends that schools maintain the prevention measures that were instituted in May. In this way, the back to school period should proceed as usual.

Depending on how the situation in Québec evolves, you may receive other bulletins with regard to measures that may need to be taken by educational institutions and organizations.

Nevertheless, the back to school period provides an ideal opportunity to remind students, their parents and school staff:

- that it is possible to stem the propagation of the virus by simple measures such as frequent hand washing with soap and water or an alcohol-based antiseptic, or by sneezing into the bend of your elbow or your upper arm instead of into your hands; in this regard, you can find helpful posters and brochures on the Web site of Pandémie Québec at:  
<http://www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/news/news.shtml>.
- that students and school staff who exhibit flu-like symptoms (e.g. fever and cough with headaches, extreme fatigue and muscle aches) should remain at home until their symptoms have disappeared. However, should such symptoms persist beyond seven days, the affected students or staff members may resume their normal activities providing their general state of health allows for it.
- that students or school staff who arrive at school exhibiting flu-like symptoms will be told to return home.

The working conditions set out in the collective agreements of personnel apply as usual. Staff absences must be managed in accordance with the conditions in effect. Administrators should ask any employee exhibiting flu-like symptoms to stay at home and, where their health status may be doubtful, to present a medical certificate justifying their absence.

For pregnant staff members, reassignment or preventive leave must follow the usual procedure, in accordance with the provisions of the *Act respecting Occupational health and safety*.

For answers to all questions relating to your responsibilities as employers and to your staff's questions, please consult the various documents in the "Workers and employers" section of the Pandémie Québec Web site at:

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

With regard to building maintenance, it is recommended that surfaces and objects with which people frequently come into contact in common areas be cleaned daily with the usual cleaning products. In dining rooms and spaces associated with personal hygiene (toilet facilities), cleaning must be done in conformity with the minimum requirements set out in the *Regulation respecting occupational health and safety*:

- dining areas must be cleaned after every meal and disinfected daily
- toilet areas must be cleaned and washed before each work shift or during the first half of each work shift, and disinfected daily. Disinfection must be carried out using a bleach-based solution or an equivalent sanitary product.

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

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

You will soon receive additional information, particularly in an updated version of the document *Preparing for an Influenza Pandemic: A Guide for Essential Services in Educational Institutions*. Information on mechanisms for monitoring absenteeism in the schools is also forthcoming.

Finally, before making a decision on a point associated with the pandemic, any Québec educational institution or organization that is unsure about the guidelines to follow should contact MELS in order to avoid making a decision that is not in line with the recommendations of the Direction générale de la santé publique and MELS.

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