Keep your staff and students healthy by planning for a pandemic event

A pandemic occurs when a new virus that is different from seasonal viruses emerges and spreads quickly between people causing illness worldwide. Most people will lack immunity to the pandemic virus. Pandemic viruses can be more severe, causing more deaths than seasonal strains. Because it is a new virus, a vaccine may not be available right away. A pandemic could therefore overwhelm normal operations in educational settings.

NPIs can help slow the spread of pandemic illnesses

When a new virus emerges, it can take up to 6 months before a pandemic vaccine is widely available. When a vaccine is not available, nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) are the best way to help slow the spread. They include personal, community, and environmental actions. These actions can provide protection against infectious diseases in schools.

As an educator, you play a key role in pandemic readiness. Planning for and practicing NPI actions will help your school respond more effectively when an actual emergency occurs. Safeguard the health of students, staff, and the community by making sure your emergency plan includes provisions for pandemic.

School dismissals can be an important tool for combating pandemic because children are more vulnerable to infection

A flu pandemic can last for several months. Early in a severe pandemic, public health officials may recommend temporary school dismissals to reduce the spread of flu before many students and staff get sick. Dismissing schools preemptively before it becomes widespread in schools can help slow the spread of disease in the community. In addition, school dismissals may be implemented selectively in certain schools that serve students at high medical risk for flu complications, or reactively, after many staff and students are sick and not attending school and regular school functions cannot be maintained. Selective and reactive school dismissals will not slow the spread of flu in surrounding communities.

Temporarily suspend classes, extracurricular activities, or dismiss schools if recommended by local public health officials

Update your existing emergency operations plan

- Meet with your emergency operations coordinator or planning team to update your emergency operations plan
- Establish relationships with key community partners and stakeholders

Address key prevention strategies in your emergency operations plan. These include:

- Promote the daily practice of everyday preventative actions at all times
- Provide pandemic prevention supplies in your school
- Plan for staff and student absences
- Develop a risk-assessment and risk-management process for your organization
- Develop a method for tracking related staff and student absences
- Identify space that can be used to separate sick people
- Plan ways to increase space between people to at least 3 feet or limit face-to-face contact between people at school
- Review your process for planning school events
- Update your emergency communication plan for disturbing timely and accurate information

Discuss and plan for school dismissals if it gets worse in your community. You should:

- Plan ways to continue educating students if schools are temporarily closed
- Identify strategies to continue essential student services
- Identify action steps for re-opening your school
- Identify and address potential language, cultural and disability barriers associated with communicating pandemic events to students and staff

Put your emergency and communications plan into action!

- Stay informed about the local pandemic situation
- Share your plans with staff, students and families
- Test and update your plan every 12-18 months
- Track staff and student absenteeism related to symptoms

For more information, visit:

- [www.ready.gov/getinvolved](http://www.ready.gov/getinvolved)
- [www.cdc.gov/npi](http://www.cdc.gov/npi)