



Building a Healthy Boston

June 2009

H1N1 Influenza (Swine Flu): Guidance for Summer Camps, Summer School Programs and Summer Activities in Boston *(These recommendations are based on information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and may change as more information becomes available.)*

As many of you know, the H1N1 influenza virus has disproportionately affected children; in Boston, over 60% of confirmed cases occurred in children under the age of 18. Twenty schools were closed in Boston due to clusters of sick students and/or teachers, and schools throughout the city undertook strategies to monitor absenteeism, identify and dismiss students who came to school ill, and to implement measures that slowed the spread of novel H1N1 flu in their facilities. And although we are seeing a decrease in cases of influenza-like illness (ILI) across the Commonwealth, many residents of the city are still reporting flu symptoms associated with the H1N1 virus.

As you prepare for your summer programming, in order to prevent transmission of H1N1 influenza, we ask that you adhere to the following Boston Public Health Commission interim guidance.

How to Help Summer Program Participants Stay Healthy

- **Provide summer program attendees, staff and volunteers with materials** prior to arrival at the program to notify them that if they are sick with ILI, they must remain at home for at least seven days. In addition, they should be reminded that if they have been exposed to a person with novel H1N1 or ILI in the 7 days prior to the start of the summer program, they may attend the program but should closely self-monitor and if they develop ILI symptoms, remain home for 7 days.
- **Consider active screening** of ALL newly arriving camp and summer program attendees, staff and volunteers by asking if they have had any symptoms of ILI in the previous 7 days. Anyone reporting ILI symptoms should be sent home. Provide education to individual campers/program participants and their parents about reporting ILI. A careful health history of each arriving participant should be taken as appropriate for your program. When a health history is taken, note any conditions that may place them at high risk for complications of influenza (such as heart disease, respiratory disease, diabetes, immune disorders, and pregnancy).

- **Promote frequent hand washing** with soap and warm water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Camps, schools and programs with access to facilities with warm water and soap should consider the promotion of scheduled, frequent hand washing breaks for staff and campers -- particularly prior to eating food. For summer programs without easy access to such facilities, consider the wide availability and access to alcohol-based hand sanitizer for staff and campers. Since children will not always avail themselves of the opportunity to wash their hands, programs should consider instituting specific hand washing breaks at multiple points through the day when everyone is *required* to wash their hands. This might include: the beginning of the day, before snack breaks, before lunch, etc.

- **Promote good “cough etiquette”**. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, or practice the habit of coughing or sneezing into one’s inner elbow if tissues are not available. Individuals should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer after sneezing or coughing into a tissue. Consider including information on hand hygiene and cough etiquette in staff and orientation sessions. Summer programs should also continue promotion of such health activities throughout the duration of scheduled activities. Consider placing posters in buildings that reinforce prevention messages. You can download “**Fight the Flu. Stop the Spread.**” posters from www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu.

Coach staff and program participants to recognize people who are not acting in a healthful way (e.g., coughing or sneezing in close group settings) and encourage proper hand hygiene or good cough practices. Note the places where people are in closest contact with one another (e.g., the dining room, classrooms, in tents, bunk beds) and adapt the areas to maximize space. When in doubt, go for an arm's length of distance between people.

- **Train your staff** about communicable disease prevention including specific information on how to recognize ILI and how to report possible cases of ILI to supervisors.

- **Stay at home if sick and keep children at home if they are sick**. People with flu-like illness should stay home for 7 days, or 24 hours after their symptoms have gone away – whichever period is longer. (Flu-like illness is defined as fever, plus one or more of the following: cough, sore throat or runny nose). Summer programs should consider strict policies mandating that staff stay home if they are sick. The same holds true for policies related to children who attend day camps.

Residential camps should consider how they will care for staff and campers who become ill and who reside at camp. Attention should be paid to ensuring that these individuals receive appropriate medical attention if necessary and, if recuperating at camp, do so in a way that reduces the chance that they will spread the illness to others. Individuals with influenza-like illness should be isolated from other staff and campers for 7 days, or 24 hours after their symptoms have gone away- whichever period is longer.

- **Stay informed** about the latest developments of the novel H1N1 flu outbreak. Because flu outbreaks can be unpredictable, and because the current outbreak involves a new strain of influenza for which people have little or no immunity, camps and summer programs should consider assigning a staff member to follow the latest developments of the novel H1N1 flu outbreak. This monitoring can include daily review of the BPHC website, www.bphc.org, the Mass. DPH website, www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu and the CDC's website, www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu.
- **Develop a working relationship with local health officials** and plan jointly for possible contingencies during this summer.

What to Do if Summer Participants or Staff Become Ill with Influenza-like Illness (ILI)

Regular meetings between summer program directors, medical staff and other appropriate professionals should occur to assess the status of summer participants and staff health. It is important to monitor daily attendance and report suspect clusters of cases to the Boston Public Health Commission at 617-534-5611, so that we can begin an investigation and provide you with appropriate recommendations to limit transmission.

Protocols should be in place for evaluating children and staff with possible ILI, isolating those who need to be isolated until parents or family can be notified and dismissing those children or staff members who need to convalesce at home for seven days.

The key to this is **preparedness**. Figure out – **now** – what needs to be done and how the summer program will respond:

Review your organization's plans for responding to a public health emergency and make sure they are up to date. Call the Commission if you need help with developing this plan. These plans should include strategies to address the following:


- A review, and possible restructuring, of current policies regarding absenteeism for staff and summer participants including but not limited to refund policy if a child must stay home with illness; NO medical clearance letter is required from a physician if a child or staff member must stay home for 7 days with illness, etc.
- Camps and summer programs should consider strict policies mandating that staff and attendees stay home if they are sick to avoid the spread of illness throughout their program
- Efficient communication with staff, summer students and parents/families about these policies and supports available to assist them (see Commission website www.bphc.org for possible resources)

- Plan for continuing services if a large number of summer student employees and staff absences occur due to personal illness
- Plan for continuing services if a large number of staff needs to stay home if summer schools, childcare and other summer programs dismiss students/children
- Dismissal of summer school students due to illness with clear instruction, plans and procedures for providing and completing course work outside of the conventional setting

Between 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM, you may call the Mayor's Health Line at 1-800-847-0710 or (617) 534-5050 if you have any questions regarding H1N1 flu and for information on how to protect staff and summer participants from possible exposure and transmission. For Boston related updates and fact sheets in multiple languages that can be distributed to staff, parents, and summer participants, please visit www.bphc.org.

The Boston Public Health Commission appreciates the strong interest that you have in protecting your staff and summer participants. Your assistance is invaluable in our efforts to limit the impact of H1N1 influenza in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Ferrer". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Barbara Ferrer
Executive Director