What is a Flu Pandemic?

An influenza (flu) pandemic is a global outbreak of disease that occurs when a new flu virus appears that can spread easily from person to person. Because people have not been exposed to this new virus before, they have little or no immunity to the virus; therefore serious illness or death is more likely to result than during seasonal flu.

It is difficult to predict when the next influenza pandemic will occur or how severe it will be. In addition, a pandemic may come and go in waves, each of which can last months at a time. The effects of a pandemic can be lessened if preparations are made ahead of time.

The illness rates for both seasonal and pandemic influenza are high among children, and schools are likely to be an important contributor to the spread of influenza in a community.

Scientific models support school closure as an effective means of reducing overall illness rates within communities and suggest that the value of this intervention is greatest if school closure occurs early in the course of a community outbreak.
How does influenza spread?

Human influenza virus is mainly transmitted from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes. A lesser mode of transmission occurs when a person touches something that has the flu viruses on it and then touches his or her mouth or nose. Some individuals who are infected may never show symptoms or have mild symptoms, but could still spread the virus to others.

When a pandemic begins, a virus-specific vaccine may not be available until 4-6 months after identification of a pandemic virus.

The supply of antiviral drugs will likely be limited throughout the pandemic. Moreover, scientists cannot be certain that antiviral drugs will be effective against a pandemic virus. For these reasons, infection control and social distancing measures will be the keys to limiting transmission, delaying the spread of the virus, and protecting people. Social distancing is a measure to decrease the frequency of contact among people in order to diminish the risk of spread of communicable diseases.
## Measures to limit the spread of the flu:

### Severe Pandemic:

All of the seasonal and mild to moderate flu methods plus:

- Possible extended school closure, which could range from weeks to up to 3 months. Presently, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Education, and other agencies are conducting a comprehensive review of school closure and its feasibility and effects in mitigating a severe pandemic. The results of this study will be shared in the coming months.

- Promote social distancing of children and teens outside the school setting by reducing their social circulation and contacts to the greatest extent possible. This could include canceling extracurricular activities.

### Mild to Moderate Pandemic:

All of the seasonal flu methods plus the following:

- Encourage the use of social distancing at the workplace, at school and in the community.

- Possible school closure for a short amount of time (possibly days to a couple of weeks).

- Work with community flu-planning team to assess whether any additional measures should be taken.

### Seasonal Flu:

- Promote hand washing and cough hygiene via school-wide campaigns and modeling by school staff.

- Encourage vaccination of staff and students for whom the flu vaccine is recommended.

- Persons developing symptoms at school should be sent home as soon as possible and instructed by appropriate officials not to return until they are well.

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### Infection control

The primary strategies for preventing spread of pandemic influenza:

- Persons with flu symptoms should:
  - Stay at home;
  - Cover nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing;
  - Wash hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers frequently; and
  - Try to maintain spatial separation of at least three feet from others if possible.

### Hand, Cough and Sneeze Hygiene

- When sneezing or coughing, cover the nose and mouth with a tissue or upper arm if a tissue is not available.

- Dispose of used tissues in a wastebasket and wash hands after coughing, sneezing, or blowing nose.

- Use warm water and soap or alcohol-based hand sanitizers to clean hands.

- Wash hands before eating or touching eyes, nose, or mouth.

### Social distancing

In a pandemic, the risk of getting the flu is greatest when one has close contact with an infected person. Social distancing measures such as school closure, telecommuting or staggered shifts for the workforce, and cancellation of public gatherings may be effective in reducing transmission risks.
Basic Components of Pandemic Planning

- Every district should have an Emergency Management Plan.
- The Plan should be flexible to encompass all hazards.
- Every district should develop a Pandemic Flu Plan.
- Plans should address four phases of emergency management planning: Mitigation and Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery. For more information: www.ed.gov/emergencyplan.
- Plans should be practiced on a regular basis.
- Plans should be developed and communicated in an interactive manner with stakeholders, including parents, faculty, other community partners and first responders.
- Plans should be based on sound data and information; www.pandemicflu.gov should be the main resource for pandemic planning and information.
- Plans should be continually reviewed and updated as new information is available. The complete planning checklist can be viewed at www.pandemic.flu.gov.

Detailed information on each component along with sample plans can be viewed at www.ed.gov
# Action Planning Template

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