

September 15, 2009

Information about novel H1N1 (swine) and seasonal flu for child care providers

What is novel H1N1 (swine) flu?

- Like the seasonal flu, novel H1N1 is a type of influenza that causes respiratory disease and spreads easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing or touching objects with the virus on them.
- Unlike the seasonal flu, novel H1N1 is a new strain of influenza. Most people don't have immunity to it, so more people will get sick when exposed to the virus.

What symptoms should you look for?

People with novel H1N1 flu develop the common symptoms of respiratory illness.

- Fever of over 100 degrees Fahrenheit
- Persistent cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches and/or headache
- Chills
- Diarrhea and vomiting

Some people infected with the flu do not get a fever.

What can child care providers do to prevent the spread of flu?

- Encourage staff and families to get immunized for H1N1 and the seasonal flu. Full protection against the influenza strains circulating this year will require two separate vaccines.
- Teach children to cough or sneeze into tissues or their sleeves. Remind them to throw away the soiled tissues and wash their hands afterward. Wash your hands as well.
- Teach staff and children to avoid touching their mouths, eyes and noses when possible.
- Discourage staff and children from sharing bottles, food, cups and other personal items.
- Encourage and reward frequent hand washing with soap and water. Children should use hand sanitizers if water is not available. Be sure to keep alcohol-based sanitizers out of reach when an adult is not present.

- Teach children to wash their hands long enough to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice — about 15 to 30 seconds — and make it a habit to do so in the following situations:
 - ✓ after sneezing or blowing their noses
 - ✓ before and after eating
 - ✓ after using the bathroom
 - ✓ when their hands appear soiled
 - ✓ and at regular intervals throughout the day

- Care providers should wash their hands in these and several other situations:
 - ✓ between contacts with children
 - ✓ after wiping a child’s nose or mouth
 - ✓ after changing diapers and helping children with toileting
 - ✓ after touching objects that may be soiled with saliva or nose drainage

What else can you do?

- Check children and staff daily to look for signs of the flu. Pay attention to changes in behavior or reports of sick family members as well as obvious signs of respiratory illness.
- Cluster children in small, consistent groups of 6 or fewer children.
- Choose a separate space for sick staff and children to stay while waiting to go home.
- Post flyers to remind people to stop the spread of viruses. Find flyers at <http://www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov> & <http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper/materials.htm>.
- Routinely clean surfaces that are frequently touched or handled, like tables, doorknobs, toilet handles, water faucets, toys and commonly shared items. Do this at least once a day AND when visibly dirty.
- Make sure your cleaning products are labeled as disinfectants against viruses, or make a bleach solution of ¼ cup bleach to a gallon of water.
- Tell parents to keep children with flu-like illnesses at home for at least 24 hours after their fever breaks without the aid of fever-reducing medications.
- Revisit your leave policy to make it easier for sick employees to stay home.
- Prepare for staff shortages by cross-training and hiring back-up employees.

When should you seek emergency medical care?

- Review your center's emergency policies about when to call 9-1-1.
- In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:
 - Fast breathing or trouble breathing
 - Not drinking enough fluids
 - Severe or persistent vomiting
 - Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
 - Bluish or gray skin color
 - Confusion, not waking up or not interacting
 - Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
 - Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and a worse cough

For up to date information about the flu in Alaska, go to <http://www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov/> .

Read extensive, updated guidelines for child care providers at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/childcare/>.