Information Update on Swine Influenza for Postsecondary Settings
April 30, 2009

The following provides updated information from the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH) in consultation with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) regarding the emerging swine flu situation. These recommendations are based on currently available information. However, since the situation is dynamic, recommendations are likely to change due to evolving circumstances. PADOH is committed to providing continuing guidance and recommendations to postsecondary institutions throughout the Commonwealth. In addition, all postsecondary institutions should continue to monitor the PADOH web site (www.health.state.pa.us) along with other authoritative public health sources including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (www.cdc.gov).

Pennsylvania has had a robust pandemic influenza plan in place for several years that includes extensive guidance for the educational setting as part of an overall community mitigation strategy (www.pandemicflu.state.pa.us). Many postsecondary institutions throughout the Commonwealth have performed exercises and adapted the plan to their local circumstances. The guidance in the Pennsylvania pandemic plan should be examined because much of the information is helpful for the current swine flu situation.

Monitoring of students and staff

All postsecondary institutions in the Commonwealth should monitor on a daily basis the (1) absenteeism rate for any reason and (2) the occurrence of respiratory illness among students and staff. The signs and symptoms of swine influenza reported to date are similar to those seen with typical seasonal influenza. The following is the commonly accepted definition for Influenza Like Illness (ILI):

A febrile respiratory illness with cough, coryza, or sore throat in the absence of a known cause other than influenza.

At the present time, we are at the tail end of the winter influenza season. Although overall seasonal influenza activity in Pennsylvania is low, small numbers of cases are still occurring...
throughout the state. There is no way to clinically distinguish seasonal influenza from swine influenza.

Any student or staff member with ILI should immediately be referred to a health professional for evaluation. In addition, any case of ILI in a student or employee should be reported to your local health department in order to discuss further measures such as specimen collection and appropriate interventions. When appropriate, parents of the student should be notified in accordance with your usual procedures.

Multiple cases (also known as clusters) of any respiratory illness (whether or not it appears to be influenza) or any rise in absenteeism should be immediately reported to your local health department for evaluation and further recommendations.

Infection control in school settings

The key to controlling the spread of respiratory infections in the educational setting, whether they are due to swine influenza or other respiratory pathogens, is implementing and practicing good infection control. This includes:

1. Cough Etiquette:

   Always remind students and staff to:
   - Cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when they cough or sneeze—have them throw the tissue away after they use it.
   - Wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after they cough or sneeze. If water is not near, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
   - Remind them to not to touch their eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs often spread this way.

2. Hand washing:

   Remind students and staff members to wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand cleaners, and make sure that supplies are available to prevent the spread of germs.
   - Encourage all to use soap and water to wash hands when hands are visibly soiled, or an alcohol-based hand cleaner when soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly soiled.
   - Encourage staff members and care providers to wash their hands to the extent possible when engaged in any activity that would bring them in contact with tissues or surfaces soiled with saliva or nose drainage.
   - Make alcohol-based hand cleaner widely available in all campus buildings.
   - Rub hands thoroughly until the alcohol has dried, when using alcohol-based hand cleaner.
• Ensure that sink locations and restrooms are stocked with soap, paper towels or working hand dryers.

• Ensure that each room is supplied with alcohol-based hand cleaner when sinks for washing hands are not readily accessible. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are not recommended when hands are visibly soiled.

3. Exclusion of ill students and staff members:

Observe all students for symptoms of respiratory illness.
• Observe closely all students for symptoms of respiratory illness.

• Notify the local health department so that appropriate guidance can be given, send the student home, if possible, and advise the student to contact his or her doctor.

• Infants and young children can become quite ill with influenza very quickly and might require urgent medical attention and possibly hospitalization.

• If a student or staff member has difficulty breathing, is lethargic, or appears to be worsening rapidly, consider calling a physician or 911.

• Encourage sick students and staff members to stay home.

• Encourage sick students or staff members to stay home until they have been without fever for 24 hours.

4. Environmental sanitation

Keep the environment clean and make sure supplies are available.
• Clean frequently touched surfaces, and commonly shared items at least daily and when visibly soiled.

• Use an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered household disinfectant labeled for activity against bacteria and viruses, an EPA-registered hospital disinfectant, or EPA-registered chlorine bleach/hypochlorite solution. Always follow label instructions when using any EPA-registered disinfectant. If EPA-registered chlorine bleach is not available and a generic (i.e., store brand) chlorine bleach is used, mix ¼ cup chlorine bleach with 1 gallon of cool water.

• Keep disinfectants out of the reach of children.

Influenza viruses, including swine influenza virus, do not remain viable in the environment for extended periods of time. Therefore, in circumstances where an institution is closed (see below) because of a confirmed case or outbreak of influenza, extensive environmental disinfection prior to re-opening is at best an ancillary public health intervention.
5. Control measures for colleges and universities:

If a case of swine influenza is confirmed in a member of the educational community (students or staff members), decisions regarding further actions and control measures should be made in consultation with your local health department and PADOH.

- The CDC has recommended that dismissal of students should be strongly considered in educational institutions with a confirmed case or a suspected case that has an epidemiologic link to a confirmed case.

- Similar considerations regarding closure or cancellation should be made regarding large gatherings linked to schools with a confirmed case (such as a concert or graduation).

- However, decisions regarding actions to be taken when a confirmed case is identified in an educational setting should be considered on a case-by-case basis, as there may be circumstances where less disruptive alternatives to closure or event cancellation can be employed.

- Postsecondary educational institutions are therefore urged to consult with public health authorities regarding these decisions.

Please go to a section with Frequently Asked Questions regarding school closings in the PA Pandemic Plan for additional information. This document can be found at: http://www.pandemicflu.state.pa.us/pandemicflu/lib/pandemicflu/schools/PANDEMICFAQ.pdf

Questions 1 through 8 pertain to school closings, questions 9 through 14 pertain to the use of school facilities in the event of an emergency, and questions 15 through 25 pertain to the provision of education and services at the local level.