



Illinois State Board of Education

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State Superintendent of Education

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Dear School Official,

The enclosed guide is designed to provide the tools needed to prepare for a potential pandemic influenza outbreak. The Illinois State Board of Education and Illinois Department of Public Health want to help schools proactively plan for and ease the possible effects of a pandemic. Like you, our first concern is the health and safety of children.

As you work to develop your plans, we ask you to keep in mind the very important distinction between seasonal influenza and pandemic influenza. Seasonal influenza is the reoccurring emergence of general flu viruses. A pandemic is a worldwide outbreak of a disease for which there is little or no natural immunity. During an influenza pandemic, a new strand of influenza will cause thousands or even millions of people to contract the disease and, in turn, spread the illness to others.

While there is no pandemic influenza in the United States at this time, history tells us that another pandemic will almost certainly occur. Currently, scientists and public health officials are concerned that the H5N1 strand of influenza, also known as avian or "bird" flu, may mutate to allow for easy human to human transmission, creating the likelihood for a pandemic. Whether or not the bird flu will be the cause of the world's next pandemic, we must prepare for the possibility.

Federal, state, and local units of government have been working together to get schools accurate, timely, and meaningful information about pandemic influenza and the potential for such an event to occur in the United States. The enclosed guide includes information and tools to guide schools, districts and local authorities in creating and maintaining contact with parents and the community in the event of a pandemic.

In the case of a pandemic, any local decision for emergency school closing should be made by the local district in consultation with and, if necessary, at the direction of your local health department, emergency management agencies, and Regional Office of Education.

We hope this guide will assist you in your planning as you integrate pandemic planning into your existing emergency plans and operational procedures.

Sincerely,

Dr. Randy J. Dunn
State Superintendent of Education
Illinois State Board of Education

Dr. Eric E. Whitaker
Director, Illinois Department of Public Health