

## **Cleaning to Reduce Influenza and Other Infectious Diseases in Schools**

<b>Depending on Assistance Needed, Call:</b>	
DGS Environmental Health and Safety	202-576-8962
LEA Contact:	
Other	

### **Introduction**

Type A influenza (including H1N1) and infectious diseases (such as, scarlet fever; pneumococcal disease or pneumococcal meningitis, streptococcus, etc.), by definition are highly contagious and spreads from person-to-person in several ways: when an ill person sneezes or coughs, infected droplets enter another person through the nose, mouth or eyes; or the droplets can land on a contact surface (e.g., a doorknob) that is touched by another person who then touches their face. Ask any teacher and they'll tell you, when one child comes to school sick, illness can spread quickly through the classroom.

Hand washing is the first step to staying healthy, but there is more that can be done. Germs are also spread by touching surfaces, so while we can't control every germ in the school environment, it makes good sense to clean and disinfect high contact surfaces and areas.

The following guidelines were prepared specifically for custodial and maintenance staff. They address:

- Routine cleaning procedures to reduce the risk of transmission during the flu season;
- Additional cleaning procedures during an influenza outbreak; and
- Measures to reduce the risk of infection for cleaning personnel.

Always remember to put safety first when working with any chemical or cleaning/disinfecting agent by following the instructions on all products before using them by reading the labels and the material safety data sheets.

### **Routine cleaning procedures to reduce the risk of transmission during the influenza season**

Effective cleaning emphasizes maximum physical removal of unwanted contaminants and pollutants using an appropriate cleaning agent and application method. When done frequently the risk of transmitting infectious agents is reduced considerably. Flu viruses, including H1N1, can survive 8-12 hours on paper or cloth, 24-48 hours on nonporous surfaces, like doorknobs or

desks, and up to 72 hours on wet surfaces. This means they can remain contagious overnight in an improperly cleaned office or school. The cleaning procedure may employ various cleaning and disinfecting agents. Remember merely applying a disinfectant is not a substitute for cleaning. In that regard, consider the following:

- If using EPA-registered disinfectants or cleaning/disinfectant products with demonstrated (proven) virucidal claims against flu viruses, check the manufacturer's instructions on "spectrum of action" and method of use (dilution, contact time, etc.). If using a product labeled only for use as a disinfectant, remember that federal law requires those surfaces being treated to be cleaned first.
- While bleach often is used alone, it does not clean, is highly corrosive to metals and is hazardous to skin, mucus membranes and the respiratory system. When using household bleach an effective solution requires one (1) part bleach for ten (10) parts water. Some bleach or other cleaning products (e.g., spray form) may not require dilution and can be used "neat." Regardless, always check the product's label for use-dilution instructions and cautions.<sup>i</sup>
- Launder or replace potentially contaminated cleaning cloths and sponges between cleanings.
- Wear appropriate protective equipment that includes gloves and splash protection<sup>iii</sup> (a face mask to prevent droplets containing flu virus from entering the eyes, nose or mouth while cleaning).
- Thoroughly clean surfaces that are touched by the hands. Here are some examples:
  - Doorknobs, light switches, elevator buttons, remote controls, handrails;
  - Computer keyboards and mice, desks, telephones, microphones; and
  - Cafeteria tables and chairs, faucet handles, coffeemakers, vending machines.
- Supply break rooms with dishwashing detergent and paper towels; clean and replace sponges often.
- Renew bathroom supplies frequently: soap, paper towels, effective waterless hand sanitizer and posters demonstrating proper hand washing procedures. Repair or replace any existing non-functioning hand air-dryers immediately.

### **Additional cleaning procedures during an influenza outbreak or confirmed cases in your school(s)**

The flu virus is killed effectively by bleach-based products or EPA-registered disinfectants or cleaning/disinfectant products with demonstrated (proven) virucidal claims against flu viruses and effective cleaning protocols as previously described.

During a flu outbreak, however, these additional cleaning procedures are advisable:

- Touch points in high traffic rooms and common areas (e.g., door handles for a main entrance) should be disinfected at least 3 times daily.<sup>iii</sup>
- Disinfectant "bombs" that emit a dry disinfectant meant to cover all surfaces in an enclosed room are recommended for certain crowded facilities, such as schools.<sup>iii</sup>
- Consider supplying individual offices and classrooms with disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizers.

- Remove all reusable utensils, plates, cups, sponges and towels from break rooms and cafeterias. Replace with disposable goods.<sup>iii</sup>
- Every cleaning service should have a planned cleaning procedure to use in a flu pandemic, and a contingency plan should the janitorial staff become ill and unable to work.

### **Measures to reduce the risk of infection for cleaning personnel**

Adults inflicted with a Type A virus can infect others one day before developing symptoms and for up to one week after becoming sick. Children can be contagious for several weeks. The H1N1 (Type A virus) symptoms are similar to other flu illnesses. Therefore, cleaning personnel should take the following steps to reduce their risk of infection during an H1N1 outbreak and other influenza strains during the regular flu season:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water using proper hand washing techniques. If soap and water are not available use a hand sanitizer containing at least 62% alcohol.
- Treat hands as potentially contaminated and avoid touching the nose and eyes.
- Sneeze or cough into a disposable tissue and discard it in a wastebasket immediately.
- If you contract the flu, stay home and away from others for at least 7 days if possible and until you have no fever for 48 hours.<sup>i</sup>

For regular influenza updates, visit the DC Department of Health website at [flu.dc.gov](http://flu.dc.gov).

### **Resources**

- [Cleaning Protocol\\*](#)
- [Hard Surface Hygiene Fact Sheet\\*](#)
- [Antimicrobial Products Registered for Use Against Influenza A Virus on Hard Surfaces](#)

<sup>i</sup> Swine Flu: Preventing Spread in the Home and Community, International Scientific Forum on Home Hygiene, April 2009.

<sup>ii</sup> The original guidelines were produced by the Cleaning Industry Research Institute in collaboration with the Simmons Center for Hygiene and Health in Home and Community, August 6, 2009.

<sup>iii</sup> H1N1 Fact Sheet for Cleaning Professionals, Cleanlink.com.