Get Your School Ready for Pandemic Flu

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Contents

Keep Your Staff and Students Healthy and Continue the Learning Process by Planning for Pandemic Flu ................................................................. 3
  Pandemic flu is not seasonal flu ......................................................................... 3
  NPIs can help slow the spread of flu .................................................................. 3
  Personal, community, and environmental NPIs .................................................. 4

Take Action to Help Slow the Spread of Flu and Illness .................................... 5
  Everyday preventive actions ............................................................................... 5
  NPIs reserved for a flu pandemic ....................................................................... 5

Before a Flu Pandemic Occurs: Plan ................................................................. 6
  Update your existing emergency operations plan .............................................. 6
  Address key prevention strategies in your emergency operations plan .............. 7
  Discuss and plan for school dismissals if flu gets worse in your community ...... 8
  Communicate about pandemic flu and NPIs ..................................................... 8
  Get input and support for your emergency operations and communication plans 9

During a Flu Pandemic: Take Action ................................................................. 10
  Put your emergency operations and communication plans into action .......... 10
  Communicate frequently with those in your communication chain ................. 11
  Take administrative action if schools are not dismissed ................................. 11
  Temporarily suspend classes or dismiss schools, if recommended by local public health officials ................................. 12

After a Flu Pandemic Has Ended: Follow Up ................................................... 13
  Evaluate the effectiveness of your emergency operations and communication plans ................................................................. 13

Readiness Resources ....................................................................................... 14
  Pandemic flu planning resources .................................................................... 14
  Seasonal flu planning resources ..................................................................... 15

Audience: Educators of childcare programs, K-12 schools, and institutions of higher education (IHE) responsible for planning for and responding to a flu pandemic and its recovery.

Purpose: This guide provides information about nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) and their use during a flu pandemic. NPIs are actions, apart from getting vaccinated and taking antiviral medications, that people and communities can take to help slow the spread of respiratory illnesses like pandemic flu. Use this guide to develop a new contingency plan or modify an existing emergency operations plan that reflects considerations specific to your educational setting and community.
Influenza can spread quickly from sick staff and students to others who are nearby in the educational setting. Seasonal influenza, also known as the flu, is a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs (see flu symptoms and complications). Staff and students are often in close contact, sharing the same space, supplies, and equipment for long periods of time. As a result, there is an increased risk that staff and students will spread flu and other illnesses to each other. Flu spreads mostly by droplets containing flu viruses traveling through the air (up to 6 feet) when a sick person coughs or sneezes. Less often, people might get flu by touching surfaces or objects with flu viruses on them and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth.

The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccine. CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone 6 months and older. Vaccination can reduce flu illnesses, doctors’ visits, and missed work and school due to flu illness, as well as prevent flu-related hospitalizations. CDC also recommends that people practice everyday preventive actions (or personal NPIs) at all times to protect themselves and their community from flu and other respiratory infections (see Page 4).

Although seasonal flu occurs every year, flu pandemics are much less common but can occur at any time. During the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic, about 61 million people in the United States were sick with flu. Of the 61 million, 32% were younger than 17 years of age.* Protecting the health of school-age children and young adults will be a public health priority during a flu pandemic. Children may be more easily infected with flu and stay infectious longer. School-based flu outbreaks often give rise to community-wide outbreaks, whereby students spread flu and other illnesses to each other, staff, and people in their households.

Do not let your school be caught by surprise! Just as you prepare for seasonal flu, you should prepare for pandemic flu. Encourage staff and students to practice good health habits and establish flexible leave and attendance policies. Most schools have developed an emergency operations plan that addresses a range of crises. Make sure your plan includes NPIs and other flu-prevention strategies.

* Shrestha S, et al. CID 52 (2011)

Pandemic flu is not seasonal flu

A flu pandemic occurs when a new flu virus that is different from seasonal flu viruses emerges and spreads quickly between people, causing illness worldwide. Most people will lack immunity to the pandemic flu virus. Pandemic flu can be more severe, causing more deaths than seasonal flu. Because it is a new virus, a vaccine may not be available right away. A pandemic could therefore overwhelm normal operations in educational settings. Read more about the important differences between seasonal flu and pandemic flu.

NPIs can help slow the spread of flu

When a new flu virus emerges, it can take up to 6 months before a pandemic flu vaccine is widely available. When a vaccine is not available, NPIs are the best way to help slow the spread of flu. They include personal, community, and environmental actions. These actions are most effective when used together. NPIs also can provide protection against other infectious diseases in schools.

As an educator, you play a key role in flu readiness. Planning for and practicing NPI actions will help your school respond more effectively when an actual emergency occurs. Safeguard the health of students, staff, and the community by making sure your emergency plan includes provisions for pandemic flu.
**Personal NPIs** are everyday preventive actions that can help keep people from getting and/or spreading flu. These actions include staying home when you are sick, covering your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and washing your hands often with soap and water.

**Community NPIs** are strategies that organizations and community leaders can use to help limit face-to-face contact. These strategies may include increasing space between students in classrooms, making attendance and sick-leave policies more flexible, canceling large school events, and temporarily dismissing schools.

**Environmental NPIs** are surface cleaning measures that remove germs from frequently touched surfaces and objects.

**CDC has created resources to help you plan for a flu pandemic.**
Visit [www.cdc.gov/npi](http://www.cdc.gov/npi) for the latest information and resources about nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPIs).

**CDC Pandemic Flu Checklist for K-12 School Administrators**

**CDC Pandemic Flu Checklist for Childcare Program Administrators**
Take Action to Help Slow the Spread of Flu and Illness

CDC has developed recommended actions for preventing the spread of flu in educational settings. Promote and reinforce the practice of everyday preventive actions at all times. Plan for and educate staff, students, and parents/guardians about additional community NPI actions that may be recommended by public health officials, if a flu pandemic occurs.

Work closely with your local public health department before a pandemic occurs to establish a flexible contingency plan that includes actions to take during a mild, moderate, severe, very severe, or extreme pandemic. Be prepared to take actions that are appropriate for the level of severity of the local pandemic outbreak. The Before, During, and After sections of this guide offer suggested actions to help you plan for and implement these recommendations.

**EVERYDAY PREVENTIVE ACTIONS**

*Everyone should always practice good personal health habits to help prevent flu.*

- **Stay home when you are sick.** Stay home for at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medicines.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue.**
- **Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.** Use at least a 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- **Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects.**

**NPIs RESERVED FOR A FLU PANDEMIC**

*Educators should be prepared to take these additional actions, if recommended by public health officials.*

- **Be prepared to allow your staff and students to stay home if someone in their house is sick.**
- **Increase space between people at school to at least 3 feet, as much as possible.**
- **Modify, postpone, or cancel large school events.**
- **Temporarily dismiss students attending childcare facilities, K-12 schools, or institutions of higher education.**

*These additional actions may be recommended for severe, very severe, or extreme flu pandemics.*

Create a culture of health in schools.

Plan workshops and trainings to educate staff and key partners and stakeholders about how to plan for pandemic flu and other emergencies.

Connect to city and county public health officials.

http://www.naccho.org/about/LHD/index.cfm

Connect to state and territorial public health officials.

http://www.astho.org/Directory

Note: The following sections include CDC’s recommended actions for preventing the spread of pandemic flu and suggested strategies for implementing these recommendations.
Did you know school dismissals can be an important tool for combating pandemic flu because children are more vulnerable to infection?

A flu pandemic can last for several months. Early in a severe pandemic, public health officials may recommend temporary school dismissals to reduce the spread of flu before many students and staff get sick. Dismissing schools preemptively before flu becomes widespread in schools and communities can help slow the spread of disease in the community. In addition, school dismissals may be implemented selectively in certain schools that serve students at high medical risk for flu complications, or reactively, after many staff and students are sick and not attending school and regular school functions cannot be maintained. Selective and reactive school dismissals will not slow the spread of flu in surrounding communities.

Establishing a relationship with your local public health department, updating your emergency operations plan to include NPIs, and practicing the plan, can help support continued learning and protect the health of staff and students. The U.S. Department of Education has outlined a 6-step process to create an emergency operations plan for your school. For more information on planning and creating an emergency operations plan, visit:


Update your existing emergency operations plan

✔ Meet with your emergency operations coordinator or planning team to update your emergency operations plan. Review all aspects of your school, such as personnel, systems, services, and other resources. Make preparations for the key prevention strategies outlined in this guide. Develop or update your plan based on various scenarios your school may face during a flu pandemic.

✔ Establish relationships with key community partners and stakeholders. When forming key relationships, include the local public health department, local hospitals, local businesses, and community leaders. Collaborate and coordinate with them on broader planning efforts. Clearly define each partner’s role, responsibilities, and decision-making authority. Review the pandemic flu plan for your community and participate in community-wide emergency preparedness activities.

Note: Educators and public health officials should proactively establish direct communication. Be sure to identify points of contact for communication, create information-sharing procedures in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and state and local privacy laws, and develop protocols for implementing public health recommendations.
Get Your School Ready for Pandemic Flu

Address key prevention strategies in your emergency operations plan

✔ Promote the daily practice of everyday preventive actions at all times (see Page 5). Use health messages and materials developed by credible public health sources, such as your local public health department or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Read more about everyday preventive actions. Learn more about cleaning and disinfecting schools.

✔ Provide flu-prevention supplies in your school.
Have supplies on hand for staff and students, such as soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, tissues, trash baskets, and disposable facemasks. Plan to have extra supplies on hand during a pandemic.
Note: Keep hand sanitizers out of reach of small children. Use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers has raised concerns about eye contamination, skin reactions, alcohol poisoning, and flammability. Small children should only use hand sanitizers under adult supervision.

✔ Plan for staff and student absences. Develop flexible pandemic flu attendance and sick-leave policies for students and staff, respectively. Staff may need to stay home when they are sick, caring for a sick household member, or caring for their children in the event of school dismissals. Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff (similar to planning for holiday staffing).

✔ Develop a method for tracking flu-related staff and student absences. Understand the usual absenteeism patterns at your school. Determine what level of absenteeism will disrupt continuity of learning. If staff and student absenteeism increases to disruptive levels, some schools may need to consider temporarily dismissing classes. Schools may be asked to report flu-related absences to the local public health department during a pandemic. Written consent may be needed to disclose a student’s health information.
Note: While the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy Rule does not apply to education records protected by FERPA, in certain circumstances the HIPAA Privacy Rule may apply to student health records (e.g., if the records are maintained by a HIPAA-covered health care provider that is not employed by a school). Review and ensure compliance with public health codes, infection control guidance, and applicable Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards.

✔ Identify space that can be used to separate sick people (if possible). Designate a space for sick staff and students who cannot leave school immediately. If possible, designate a nearby separate bathroom just for sick people. Develop a plan for cleaning the room daily.

For Institutions of Higher Education (IHE): Work with key partners and stakeholders to identify ways to separate sick students from those who are well. Consider relocating sick students to other housing areas or the student health center. Make plans to send sick students home if they live nearby. Include strategies for housing and caring for international students who become sick.

✔ Plan ways to increase the space between people to at least 3 feet or limit face-to-face contact between people at school. Several ways to do this include moving desks farther apart, leaving empty seats between students, dividing classes into smaller groups, holding outdoor classes, and canceling school-related group meetings and activities.

✔ Develop a risk-assessment and risk-management process for your school. Work closely with local public health officials to develop a contingency plan if assessing and managing risks among staff and students is needed (for example, conducting daily health screenings for flu-like symptoms during a pandemic).

For Childcare Programs: Young children may not be able to communicate when something is wrong. Work closely with public health officials to develop a plan for identifying children who get sick during the school day. Offer childcare providers a “refresher” training on how to recognize flu-like signs and symptoms in children.

✔ Review your process for planning school events.
Identify actions to take if you need to postpone or cancel events, such as sporting and special events. Consider limiting access to school campuses by non-essential visitors.
Discuss and plan for school dismissals if flu gets worse in your community

✔ Plan ways to continue educating students if schools are temporarily dismissed. Consider using Web-based instruction, e-mail, social media, local television, radio stations, or U.S. mail.

✔ Identify strategies to continue essential student services. If schools are dismissed, meal, health, and social services may need to continue.

For IHE: Think creatively to identify solutions for minimizing students gathering in the cafeteria area. For example, establish a “food delivery” approach for sick students. Create an online menu to allow sick students to order food without leaving their dorm room. Arrange for food to be delivered directly to them by cafeteria staff, roommates, or other students.

Identify action steps for re-opening your school. The decision to re-open schools should be made in consultation with local public health officials. Note: IHE differ from childcare programs and K–12 schools in that it is more difficult to completely close and re-open a college or university. Plans should address students who are not able to return home (like international and out-of-state students) and the continuity of critical administrative and research functions.

Communicate about pandemic flu and NPIs

✔ Update your emergency communication plan for distributing timely and accurate information. Identify everyone in your chain of communication (for example, staff, students, suppliers, and key community partners and stakeholders) and establish systems for sharing information with them. Maintain up-to-date contact information for everyone in the communication chain. Identify platforms, such as a hotline, automated text messaging, and a website to help disseminate information to those inside and outside your school.

✔ Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating pandemic flu information to staff and students. Learn more about reaching people of diverse languages and cultures by visiting: www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/index.html. Learn more about communicating to staff in a crisis at: www.ready.gov/business/implementation/crisis
Get input and support for your emergency operations and communication plans

✔ Share your plans with staff, students, and key community partners and stakeholders. Develop training and educational materials about the plans for staff.

✔ Test and update your plans every 12–18 months. Start with discussion-based practice sessions, such as tabletop exercises to identify and address the gaps in your plans.

Get up-to-date on your pandemic flu and emergency response trainings.

The U.S. Department of Education has created resources to help you plan for pandemic flu. For the latest information and resources about emergency planning, visit http://rems.ed.gov/TrainingPackage.aspx

Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities

During a Flu Pandemic: Take Action

Did you know that flu is more dangerous than the common cold for children?

It is important that your emergency operations planning team meets regularly during a pandemic to accurately assess, manage, and communicate possible risks. Flu can be very dangerous for school-age children. It causes more hospitalizations among children than any other vaccine-preventable disease. Early action to slow the spread of flu will help keep staff and students healthy and help students continue to learn.

Put your emergency operations and communication plans into action

✔ Stay informed about the local flu situation. Get up-to-date information about local flu activity from public health officials. Be aware of temporary school dismissals in your area because these may affect your staff.

Note: Early in the pandemic, local public health officials may recommend schools be dismissed temporarily to allow time to gather information about how fast and severe the flu virus is spreading in your community. Temporarily dismissing schools also can help slow the spread of flu.

✔ Implement NPI actions to protect your staff and students (see Page 5). Meet with your emergency coordinator or planning team to discuss plans for starting NPI actions, such as increasing space between people or cancelling school events.

Again, work closely with your local public health department when starting NPIs reserved for flu pandemics. Discuss how these actions will impact your school.

✔ Track staff and student absenteeism related to flu-like symptoms. Work with local public health officials to determine when to begin tracking and reporting flu-related absenteeism. They may ask you to notify them immediately if absenteeism is higher than normal for your school. Learn more about flu symptoms at: https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/complications.htm

✔ Implement your risk-assessment and risk-management plan. Work closely with local public health officials and healthcare partners to conduct health risk assessments at your school, if warranted by the severity of the pandemic.
Communicate frequently with those in your communication chain

✔ Update key community partners and stakeholders regularly. Share information about how your school is responding to the pandemic.

✔ Provide flu-prevention supplies and distribute health messages and materials to staff, students, and their households. Continue to promote everyday preventive actions (see Page 5). Ensure that your school has supplies, such as tissues, trash baskets, disposable facemasks, and at least a 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer for staff and students. Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects with regular soap and water or Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved products. Offer resources that provide reliable pandemic flu information. Address the potential fear and anxiety that may result from rumors or misinformation. For pandemic flu health messages and materials, visit: http://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/tools-resources/educational-materials.html

Note: Messages, materials, and resources should be culturally appropriate.

Take administrative action (as needed) if schools are not dismissed

✔ Implement flexible attendance and sick-leave policies (if possible). Continue to encourage staff and students to stay home if they are sick or caring for a sick household member. Discourage the use of perfect attendance awards in childcare and K–12 school settings. Notify staff of when your school plans to implement pandemic flu leave policies. Provide instructions about how and when to safely return to school.

Note: If a staff member or student gets sick with flu symptoms, they should stay home to lower their chances of spreading illness to others. CDC recommends they stay home for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicines, such as acetaminophen. This will help ensure their fever is truly gone, and they are past the point of being contagious. People with weakened immune systems may need to stay home longer.

✔ Increase space to at least 3 feet and limit face-to-face contact between people at school.

✔ Accommodate staff and students who are at high risk for flu complications. Provide staff who are at high risk for flu complications with alternative work arrangements (if possible). Offer students who are at high risk for flu complications with options for completing class work (if schools are not dismissed). Encourage them to stay, or work from, home (if possible). They also should consult their healthcare provider about how to protect their health. Learn who may be at high risk for flu complications at: http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/high_risk.htm

✔ Provide information that explains why and when schools may be temporarily dismissed. Some households may need to make alternate childcare arrangements.

✔ Postpone or cancel extracurricular activities or large events. Suspend extracurricular group activities and large events, such as after-school student activities, meetings, and sporting events, if recommended by public health officials.

For IHE: Work with public health officials and key partners and stakeholders to determine when to postpone or cancel large events (for example, work with the National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA] regarding the cancellation of sporting events).

✔ Separate those who become sick at school from those who are well. Send sick staff home immediately. Send students who become sick during the school day to a designated space away from others (particularly from those who are at high risk for flu complications) until they are able to go home. Provide them with clean disposable facemasks to wear until they can leave. Work with your local public health department and hospital or health center staff to care for those who become sick.
sick. Ask a parent/guardian to pick them up as soon as possible. If needed, arrange transportation for staff and students who need emergency care. Read more about caring for those sick with the flu at: http://www.cdc.gov/flu/consumer/caring-for-someone.htm

Note: Providing sick staff with facemasks does not replace the need to encourage them to go home and stay home when they are sick. Facemasks may be in short supply during a flu pandemic.

For IHE: Implement your plans for separating and isolating sick students. Remember, public health recommendations may change during a pandemic. Be ready to adapt your plans as needed.

Temporarily suspend classes or dismiss schools, if recommended by local public health officials

✔ Put into action strategies for continuing education and essential student services. Work with partners to make sure that meal, health, and social services continue.

Note: IHE will need to determine which school operations must continue and implement plans for providing housing and meal services to students who are not able to return home during dismissals.

✔ Discourage staff and students from gathering or socializing in other places when schools are dismissed. They should avoid gathering in places like local restaurants and shopping malls.

✔ Update everyone in your communication chain about when schools will re-open. Work with public health officials to implement steps to overcome the impact of schools being dismissed.

Communicate only accurate, up-to-date information.
Do not repeat misinformation, even to say it is not true. Rumors and misinformation may contribute to confusion and fear.

CDC Video: Do Your Part to Stop the Spread of Flu at Childcare Facilities and K–12 Schools
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8msgeGjI3xU
Did you know that each day about 55 million students and 7 million staff attend more than 130,000 public and private schools in the United States?

Remember, a flu pandemic can last for several months. By implementing the recommendations in this guide, schools can help protect one-fifth of the country’s population from flu. When public health officials determine that a flu pandemic has ended, work with them to identify criteria for phasing out and ending your school’s NPI actions. The criteria should be based on reduced flu severity or a slowing of the outbreak in your local area. The criteria also should consider how easy or difficult it will be to end each action and return to normal operations.

**Evaluate the effectiveness of your emergency operations and communication plans**

✔ Discuss and note lessons learned. Gather feedback from staff, students, parents/guardians, and key community partners and stakeholders to improve your plans. Identify any gaps in your plans and any needs you may have for additional resources.

✔ Maintain and expand your emergency planning team. Look for ways to expand community partnerships. Identify agencies or partners needed to help you prepare for pandemic flu, and make an effort to add them to your planning team.

✔ Revisit your risk-assessment and risk-management plan. Determine ways to improve planning and implementation processes. Assess the availability of meal, medical, mental health, and social services for staff and students.

✔ Update and practice your emergency operations and communication plans every 12–18 months. Update your plans based on lessons learned, and replace necessary supplies and equipment.

**Congratulations on planning for a flu pandemic**

A flu pandemic can occur at any time, and having a plan in place is essential. Your contingency or emergency operations plan will help protect the health and safety of your staff and students, while continuing the learning process. Coordinate your planning activities with local public health officials and key community partners and stakeholders to help achieve your goals.

**Meet with your emergency coordinator or planning team within 30 days after a flu pandemic ends.**

Debrief with your team and key community partners and stakeholders while they still remember events.

**Community Mitigation Guidelines to Prevent Pandemic Influenza—United States, 2017**

http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.rr6601a1

**Questions?**

Help and planning resources are just a click away. Visit [www.cdc.gov/npi](http://www.cdc.gov/npi) and [www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic)
Readiness Resources

Pandemic Flu Planning Resources

CDC Pandemic Flu Planning Tools and Resources
- Visit [www.cdc.gov/npi](http://www.cdc.gov/npi) for the latest information and resources about nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPIs)
- Learn who may be at high risk for flu complications [http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/high_risk.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/high_risk.htm)
- Community Mitigation Guidelines to Prevent Pandemic Influenza—United States, 2017 [http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.rr6601a1](http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.rr6601a1)
- Visit [http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/index.htm) for the latest information and resources about pandemic flu
- Reaching People of Diverse Languages and Cultures with Flu Communications [http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Audience/index.html)
- Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) [http://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/index.asp](http://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/index.asp)

CDC Pandemic Flu NPI Planning Guides

CDC Checklists

CDC Trainings

Additional Planning Information
- Legal Preparedness for School Closures in Response to Pandemic Influenza and Other Emergencies - Georgetown and Johns Hopkins Universities [http://www.publichealthlaw.net/Projects/panflu.php](http://www.publichealthlaw.net/Projects/panflu.php)
Culture, Language, and Health Literacy (see Essential Health Literacy Tools)
http://www.hrsa.gov/culturalcompetence/index.html
H1N1 and Higher Education Lessons Learned: Pandemic Flu Tools, Tips, and Takeaways from the Big 10+2 Universities

Connecting with Public Health Agencies
■ Connect to city and county public health officials for local information
http://www.naccho.org/about/LHD/index.cfm
■ Connect to state and territorial public health officials for statewide information http://www.astho.org/Directory/

Seasonal Flu Planning Resources

CDC Seasonal Flu Information
■ Visit www.cdc.gov/flu for the latest information and resources about seasonal flu
■ The Flu: Caring for Someone Sick at Home http://www.cdc.gov/flu/consumer/caring-for-someone.htm
■ Summary of Weekly Flu View http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/summary.htm

CDC Fact Sheets
■ Protect Yourself and Your Students from Flu During the School Year http://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/communication/pdf/protect-yourself-your-students-flu-during-school-year-factsheet.pdf
■ How To Clean and Disinfect Schools to Help Slow the Spread of Flu http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/cleaning.htm

CDC Brochures

CDC Videos
■ Do Your Part to Stop the Spread of Seasonal Flu at Childcare Facilities and K–12 Schools https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8msgGeGj3xU&feature=youtu.be
■ Do Your Part to Stop the Spread of Seasonal Flu at Colleges and Universities https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fca1g1N2T5E&feature=youtu.be
■ Do Your Part to Stop the Spread of Seasonal Flu at Home https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9APKBBr18Cc&feature=youtu.be

CDC Posters

Additional Planning Information
■ Flu Near You https://flunearyou.org/