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To date, no case of avian flu caused by the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus has been detected in the Americas

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) recommends that all countries and communities of the Americas prepare themselves for a possible flu pandemic

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For questions or comments, e-mail: FluInfo@paho.org or contact the Ministry of Health in your country



WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TO PREPARE FOR A POSSIBLE INFLUENZA PANDEMIC?

An influenza (flu) pandemic is an influenza outbreak on a global scale due to the emergence of a new influenza virus that is both highly aggressive and easily transmissible between humans. The international community has been on alert since 2003, when a new avian influenza virus, highly pathogenic H5N1, caused large outbreaks in birds. The H5N1 virus causes severe flu in many types of birds, including chickens. If the avian H5N1 flu virus gains the ability to infect and transmit easily between humans, the chances of a new global influenza pandemic would increase.

Why are schools important in preparing for a possible influenza pandemic?

Historically, schools have played a key role in the spread of influenza. Close interaction between students in their classrooms facilitates the spread of the virus among students and then to their homes. For this reason, school closings may be an effective option for preventing wide spread of infection in the early stages of a global outbreak. The decision of whether to close schools and child-care facilities will be made by health authorities in each country in accordance with national pandemic preparedness plans.

What can schools do now in preparing for a possible influenza pandemic?

A moderate to severe influenza pandemic could create social and health-care needs that would exceed the capacity of existing services, and could produce social and economic disruption. The educational community must be informed and prepared. The following are effective actions that can be promoted to help prevent the spread of influenza as well as other contagious illnesses.

- 1 Promote handwashing.** Hands can transmit diarrheal diseases as well as respiratory illnesses such as influenza. A healthy person can become infected by touching his/her nose, eyes or mouth after touching an object or surface recently contaminated with the flu virus. Schools should promote routine handwashing with soap and water (including rubbing between the fingers) for about 40 to 60 seconds, and drying by air or using a clean towel, preferably disposable paper towels.



Wash your hands with soap and water

- 2 Promote good cough/sneeze etiquette.** Influenza viruses can be transmitted through miniscule droplets that remain suspended in the air after coughing or sneezing. To reduce transmission, children should be taught to cover their coughs and sneezes with a tissue rather than with their hands, and to dispose of tissues immediately after use (hands should preferably be washed even after using a tissue). If no tissue is available, they should cough or sneeze into their upper sleeve.



Fuente: CDC

Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands

Preparedness can make a difference in responding to a flu pandemic. New behaviors need time to become part of our daily routines. Every school and school community has the opportunity and responsibility to prepare itself now for any future flu pandemic.

e-FluINFO will help you identify effective measures that can be taken at the community level to reduce human transmission of an influenza virus and reduce the impact of the next influenza pandemic.