



April, 2009

## SPECIAL EDITION

\*\*\*

*e-FluINFO* may be freely reproduced and distributed. Modifications of the text or format are not permitted

\*\*\*

For questions or comments, e-mail: [FluInfo@paho.org](mailto:FluInfo@paho.org) or contact the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education in your country



## WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TO PREPARE FOR POSSIBLE INFLUENZA OUTBREAKS?

The international community is on alert due to the appearance of influenza (flu) outbreaks caused by a new flue virus –known as H1N1- capable to infect and transmit between humans.

### Why are schools important in preparing for possible flu outbreaks?

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 an 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 preparedness plans to confront public health issues of international concern.

### What can schools do now in preparing for a possible flu outbreak?

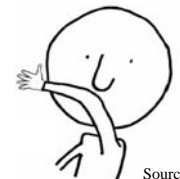
A moderate to severe influenza outbreak could cause large numbers of people to get sick in a short period of time. This could produce social disruption, affect the delivery of goods and services and overwhelm the capacity of health care services. The educational community must be informed and prepared. 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.



Source CDC

**Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands**

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

*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 a possible outbreak. .