



# Dutchess County Department of Health Public Health Alert

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## ***Guidance on Helping Child Care & Early Childhood Programs Respond to Influenza during the 2009-2010 Influenza Season***

*Date: September 8, 2009 - 1:00pm*

Please Distribute to: Child Care programs, Head Start programs, and other Early Childhood programs.

### **SUMMARY:**

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released new guidance on September 4, 2009 to help decrease the spread of flu among children in early childhood programs. The guidance is can be accessed at [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov).
- CDC also released a toolkit entitled "Preparing for the Flu: A Communication Toolkit for Child Care and Early Childhood Programs," providing resources to help early childhood programs communicate with their staff and parents. The toolkit is posted on the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/childcare/toolkit/>.
- Early childhood program providers are asked to: Encourage children and staff to get vaccinated for seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu according to CDC recommendations; help facilitate good handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes; and separate sick children and staff from others, and send them home as soon as possible.
- Early childhood program providers should develop a plan for responding to a flu outbreak, including: Plans for covering key positions when staff members are home sick; keeping staff and parents informed about the recommended period of time that sick staff and children should stay home; and protecting people at higher risk for flu complications.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released new guidance on September 4, 2009 to help decrease the spread of flu among children in early childhood programs and among early childhood program providers during the 2009–2010 flu season. This guidance provides actions that should be taken now as well as additional strategies to use if flu conditions become more severe than conditions in the Spring and Summer of 2009. You can find the guidance posted on the CDC's Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/childcare/guidance.htm> and on the Health And Human Services' website at [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov).

Children and staff with a flu-like illness should stay at home until they are fever-free for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medicines. A flu-like illness is defined as fever or chills and cough or sore throat. In addition, the symptoms of seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu virus can include runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may also have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu, including 2009 H1N1, and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

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\***Health Alert**- conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention; **Health Advisory**- provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action; **Health Update**- provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

**Dutchess County Department of Health**

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Early childhood program providers should develop a plan for responding to a flu outbreak. This includes plans for covering key positions when staff members are home sick, keeping staff and parents informed about the recommended period of time that sick staff and children should stay home; and protecting people at higher risk for flu complications.

Parents should plan for alternate child care in case their usual early childhood program must close.

To help implement recommendations for the new guidance, CDC is releasing "*Preparing for the Flu: A Communication Toolkit for Child Care and Early Childhood Programs.*" The toolkit provides information and communication resources to help early childhood programs communicate with their staff and parents. The toolkit is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/childcare/toolkit/>.

### **Recommendations for Current Flu Conditions (similar severity to the Spring and Summer of 2009)** **Children and staff with flu-like symptoms**

- Early childhood program providers should perform a daily health check of children and staff. This health check involves directly observing the child, talking with the child, and talking with their parent(s) or guardian.
- In addition to looking for signs of illness, the early childhood program provider should look for the following: A change in the child's behavior (like crankiness, unusual crying, decreased appetite, and decreased interest in playing); reports of illness in the child or a family member; or reports of a recent visit to a healthcare provider by the child or family member.
- Sick children and staff should be separated from well people as soon as possible. They should be sent home and stay there (except to seek medical care, if necessary) until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medicines (any medicine that contains ibuprofen or acetaminophen).

### **Considerations for people at higher risk for flu complications**

- Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people). Anyone can have serious problems from the flu. Some groups are at higher risk for complications from the flu. These include children younger than 5 years of age (children in early childhood programs are in this age group), pregnant women, people of any age with chronic health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease) and people 65 years of age and older. Among children less than 5 years old, the risk for severe complications from seasonal flu is highest among children less than 2 years old. Infants less than 6 months of age are particularly vulnerable because they are too young to receive the seasonal or 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine.
- Children and staff at higher risk for flu complications who become sick with flu-like illness should talk to their health care provider as soon as possible.

### **Hand hygiene/respiratory etiquette**

- Even under the best of circumstances, transmission of infectious diseases like the flu cannot be completely prevented in early childhood or other settings.
- The new guidelines emphasize the importance of promoting basic foundations of flu prevention: getting vaccinated, frequent hand washing with soap and water, covering noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, and staying home when sick
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- Staff and children should wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Everyone should cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. When tissues are not available, coughing or sneezing into one's arm or sleeve is recommended.
- It is important to remember that not everyone with flu will have a fever and that people infected with the flu may continue to be infectious for a few days after fever goes away. So, it is important to remind everyone to continue to follow recommendations for hand hygiene and cough etiquette.

### **Routine cleaning**

- People may sometimes get flu if they touch droplets left on hard surfaces and objects by those who are sick and then touch their eyes, nose, or mouth. Studies show that flu virus on surfaces may be able to infect a person for up to 2-8 hours after being deposited on the surface.
- Early childhood program providers should make sure to routinely clean areas and objects (such as toys) that children and staff touch often. Wipe these surfaces with a household disinfectant that is usually used, following the directions on the product label. Additional disinfection of these surfaces beyond routine cleaning is not recommended.

### **Selective early childhood closure**

- Some early childhood programs may consider temporarily closing if flu transmission is high in the community. Early childhood program providers should work closely with their local and state public health officials when considering this course of action.

### **Additional Recommendations for More Severe Flu Conditions (compared to severity of the Spring and Summer of 2009)**

#### **Permit children and staff at higher risk of complications from flu to stay home**

If local flu severity increases and flu is spreading in the community, children and staff at higher risk of complications from flu might choose to stay home to avoid further exposure. Children and staff who stay home should also try to decrease their exposure to flu in other ways by avoiding large public gatherings such as sporting events and concerts.

People who are more likely to have flu complications should be reminded to seek care and early treatment with antiviral medicines if they do get sick with a flu-like illness.

#### **Encourage social distancing**

Early childhood programs are encouraged to try innovative ways of increasing the space between children and staff. The goal should be to keep distance between people at most times or to cluster children in small, consistent groups of 6 or fewer children.

Parents should be encouraged to develop other child care plans in case their early childhood program closes.

Communities may also decide to help develop emergency child care plans and programs in case a significant number of early childhood program facilities close during a severe flu outbreak.

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## **Extend the time sick children and staff stay home**

Under more severe flu conditions, decisions about the length of time staff and children with flu-like symptoms should stay home will be made with local public health officials based on the flu conditions in a particular area.

If a decision is made to extend the time, sick people should stay home, children and staff with flu-like symptoms should stay home for at least 7 days, even if their symptoms go away sooner. If any children or staff are still sick after 7 days, they should stay home for at least another 24 hours after all their symptoms are gone.

## **Reactive or preemptive early childhood closure**

Early childhood program providers may consider closing the program if a lot of children or staff are absent, a large number of children are being sent home each day because they are sick, or for other reasons that make it difficult to keep the early childhood program functioning. (reactive closure)

CDC may recommend closing early childhood programs early to decrease the spread of flu in the community or to reduce demand on the local healthcare system. This is based on information about the spread of **severe flu** in the region. This type of closure is most effective at decreasing the spread of flu and burden on the healthcare system when done early in relation to the amount of flu activity in the area. (preemptive closure)

When the decision is made to close early childhood programs, CDC recommends doing so for 5-7 calendar days. Early childhood programs should work closely with local public health officials to assess when programs should be reopened.

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