Schools have been advised that pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza is now widespread in the general community throughout WA. The Department of Health has advised that people with influenza-like illness are not being routinely tested by health authorities. The focus of prevention in schools is to reinforce the message that students and staff with influenza-like illness should stay away from school and from public places until their symptoms have abated. Sound health and hygiene practices are to be used in schools.

The following questions and answers have been developed and endorsed by the Department of Health to assist schools with specific issues.

Q. How can schools reinforce hygiene messages?
A. Schools can provide educational activities to promote healthy habits and reduce the spread of influenza. Students, parents and staff should be reminded that preventing the spread of influenza primarily focuses on maintaining sound health and hygiene practices. Messages should include:

- Wash your hands frequently (alcohol based cleaners are useful if soap and water is not easily accessed), especially after coughing and sneezing.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and dispose of the tissue in a rubbish bin afterward.
- Avoid contact with people who are unwell.
- Ask your doctor about getting the seasonal influenza vaccination which will help protect you against seasonal influenza especially if you belong to one of the groups for whom the vaccine is provided free (all adults aged 65 years and over, Aboriginal people aged 50 years and over, Aboriginal people aged 15 to 49 years with underlying medical conditions, children aged six months to four years) or is recommended (everyone six months old and above with underlying medical conditions). Note that the seasonal influenza vaccine will not protect against the pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza virus.

Q. What should principals do if there is a suspected outbreak at the school?
A. Principals should consider the following strategies to manage a suspected outbreak at the school:

- Reinforce the messages above to students, parents and staff. Urge students and staff at high risk of complications to see their doctor early if they develop influenza-like illness.
- Send home those students or staff with symptoms (e.g. high temperature, sore throat, acute cough, runny nose), and encourage parents to keep children at home until symptoms have resolved.
- Work areas and shared surfaces should ideally be cleaned twice daily according to current cleaning protocols.
- If the outbreak is causing significant absence or illness, or if there are any other concerns, principals should contact their local Public Health Unit and Director Schools.

Q. What are the current cleaning protocols?
A. Work areas and shared surfaces should be cleaned as follows:

- Use disposable cloths and disposable gloves, and clean surfaces as usual with a neutral detergent and water.
- Avoid touching the face with gloved or unwashed hands.
- In addition to routine cleaning, the following surfaces which are commonly touched should be disinfected:
  - door handles and light switches
  - tables and counters
  - armrests of chairs (if not fabric)
  - bathroom surfaces including door handles, door locks, toilet seats and buttons
  - taps, wash-basins, counters.
- Influenza viruses are killed by a number of chemical disinfectants readily available from consumer and commercial sources.
Q. Will the Department of Health advise principals if a student or staff member is confirmed or suspected of having pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza?
A. No. Schools will not be notified of individual cases because there is no public health action required for identified cases. Principals should continue to encourage staff, students and teachers to self monitor for illness, and stay away from school if sick.

Q. What actions should principals take with regard to staff members who are pregnant and/or who have chronic health conditions?
A. Staff members who are not pregnant nor have underlying health conditions do not need to see a doctor unless their illness requires it. People who may be at risk of severe illness, including pregnant women and people with underlying conditions including:
- respiratory disease such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- heart disease
- diabetes
- renal disease
- morbid obesity
- weakened immune systems

should be advised to seek medical attention if they develop an influenza-like illness.

Q. Are any specific actions required by schools in remote communities or schools with students with disabilities or chronic health conditions?
A. No actions are required over and above those identified in this document. In education support schools where there may be many students with chronic illnesses that predispose them to complications of influenza infection, it is recommended that outbreaks of influenza-like illness should be reported to a Public Health Unit.

Q. Are people with pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza being placed in enforced isolation by the Department of Health?
A. No. Enforceable measures including quarantine and isolation are no longer being used by the Department of Health to control pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza in the community. However, it is important for unwell people to 'self-isolate' and stay home until fully recovered to reduce transmission in the school environment.

Q. Where a parent has been confirmed to have pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza or influenza-like illness, should their child stay at home?
A. No. However, the child should be closely monitored for illness and stay away from school if illness develops.

Q. Where a student has confirmed pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza or influenza-like illness should well siblings stay home?
A. No. However, the sibling should be closely monitored for illness and stay away from school if illness develops.

Q. If a child or staff member is confirmed as having pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza or influenza-like illness, for how many days should they absent themselves from school?
A. Regardless of whether or not influenza infection is confirmed, a student or staff member who becomes ill with an influenza-like illness should stay at home until fever and acute illness symptoms have completely resolved, or seven days from the date of onset of symptoms, whichever is longer. If antiviral medicine was given early in the illness and the student or staff member is well after three completed days of treatment, they may return to school.

Q. Where can students, parents and staff members go for medical advice?
More information is available from the Department of Health website or telephone the National Human Swine Influenza Hotline on 1800 2007. Health Direct can also be telephoned on 1800 022 222 for medical advice.