

September 14, 2009

Dear Superintendent:

RE: School Influenza Surveillance

Alberta Health Services, is requesting the assistance of your school staff to report to Public Health when they seen an absentee rate due to illness of greater than 10% in both students and staff. Monitoring sudden, sustained occurrences of school absenteeism is a sensitive measure for identifying the arrival of influenza in the community, and enables health care staff to provide appropriate preventive measures for the school and community.

The arrival of influenza in the community has often been recognized first through school surveillance which takes place throughout the school year. If absenteeism rates of greater than 10% due to illness are identified in any school, we ask school principals to use their current reporting protocols to notify Public Health who will investigate further and may request that the school provide the names and telephone numbers of 4-6 acutely ill students. Public Health staff will then investigate each of the 4-6 students for symptoms, and if possible, collect specimens for lab testing. As per protocol, whenever there is greater than 10% absenteeism due to illness in the school setting, public health will investigate and recommend preventive measures as appropriate.

Schools will **NOT** be notified of individual cases of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 in their students or staff as was initially done in spring 2009. It is expected that all students and staff with influenza-like-illness will stay home until they are feeling well enough to return to school and participate in normal activities. There is no requirement for close contacts of cases of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza virus to stay home from school or work if they remain free of symptoms.

Your schools' participation will provide a great service to your community, and we look forward to working with you throughout the school year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gerry Predy, Senior MOH
Alberta Health Services

Medical Officer of Health, Zone
Alberta Health Services