

Questions asked at School Pandemic Workshop and Planning Meetings
“FAQs”
Draft Responses
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****The following information was compiled by the above authors and is subject to change. These are our best answers, from our respective areas, to questions raised at School TTXs as of this date. This is an informal, living document that will evolve as further knowledge regarding school closures in a pandemic is obtained. ****
(EVW)

1. What will a pandemic mean for schools at the local level? Will schools be asked to close?

A: It will mean that schools could be closed for up to six (6) weeks during the first wave of a pandemic. Schools may be closed by order of the local public health department.

School closure may be a tool for a Public Health Officer to use to help control spread of disease through their community. Duration of closure is unpredictable at this time, from days to weeks. More importantly, school closure could have secondary and unintended consequences to the community (see below).

2. Who will decide when to close a school and what events trigger a school closure?

A: The Public Health Officer who oversees your particular school district will decide if and when to close. The trigger for closure may vary but it was the consensus of the attendees that if Pandemic Flu was confirmed in Region 7 they would want a region-wide closure of the schools.

This was also the consensus of the State and Local Workgroup, that the impact of a pandemic wave would likely be regional. Further, decisions to close, while this would be a public health measure used by the Health Officer, should be made collaboratively with, and/or the

process should be made transparent for, involved school systems. Such decisions would be very early on, just when a pandemic strain is entering Michigan jurisdictions, if not before. The State and Local Workgroup, along with federal partners, are hoping to determine a trigger point (incidence rate, or number of cases) that would lead to closures within a particular jurisdiction, and will be working with school and local health officials to be sure the trigger is best for all stakeholders, especially for the public's health.

3. If a school is closed because of a contagious disease, who has the authority to determine that the school should re-open?

A: The Public Health Officer who oversees that school district will determine the date schools can re-open.

4. What are the consequences of closing a school district or school because of Pandemic Flu?

A: There are many, and the impact may vary depending upon the community. These consequences should be discussed as possibilities during a pandemic should a school-closure measure be instituted: 1) Where are the children, are they staying home or gathering at the malls? 2) Are there children who rely on schools for nutrition programs? 3) Will there be consequences of working parent (s) that have to stay home caring for children, thus unable to go to work, leading to increased absenteeism? 4) How will loss of school-time be addressed (credits/graduation impacts, etc, etc). There are more- and at the state and federal level, these same issues are being discussed. There are no hard and fast answers, but the key is not to institute measures without being aware of potential issues. More guidance from the federal and state levels to address potential solutions should be coming.

5. How does a school district or school close in the event of a pandemic?

A: It is no different than when you would have some other type of unscheduled closing.

Although unscheduled, in some ways it may be more controlled, as this can be planned for ahead of time, with pre-made teaching plans, etc.

6. How does the closing of a school district or school affect the school district's State subsidy?

A: In a state of emergency, both MDCH and MDE acknowledge the need to have the Governor and her staff be aware that the subsidy requirements may need to be waived. This will be addressed at the Cabinet/State Emergency Operations level, and legislative actions could also occur as well.

- 7. Do schools pay staff when a school is closed on account of contagious disease?**

A: School systems will need to address this issue, which could vary across districts.

There are different types of staff, and they each may have different issues. We have noted at the state level a need for Education to incorporate union issues into planning and response.

- 8. If an emergency situation results in absences of faculty and staff, under what authority can local school officials reassign staff?**

A: Districts do have some local discretion in reassigning staff, depending upon local contracts. However, reassignment of certified staff to a position outside of their certification could be problematic. Schools might need to prepare to activate retired or unemployed certified staff to substitute in the short term.

- 9. What is a Point of Dispensing (POD), and who is responsible for the building when such designation takes effect?**

A: A POD is a location that Public Health has determined it will use for dispensing vaccines or medications during a public health emergency. Examples would be: Smallpox, Pandemic Flu, etc. The building maintenance and operation is the responsibility of Emergency Management although they would welcome the assistance of the school staff.

- 10. Who chose the schools that have been designated as PODs and under what authority?**

A: The State SNS (Strategic National Stockpile) planners contacted Public Health Departments throughout the state and asked them to come up with PODs within their jurisdictions that would fit the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) guidelines. The local health department Emergency Preparedness Coordinators went to various sites throughout their jurisdictions and obtained permission and signed MOUs (Memorandum of Understanding) at each designated

site. The authority that they are acting under is the Public Health Code.

11. How can superintendents find out which, if any, school in their districts or communities have been designated as PODs?

A: If your school was designated as a POD, you would know because the local EPC would have had contact with you or one of your administrators to sign an MOU.

12. Does the State Plan address liability issues that could arise from the use of school facilities?

A: Under Public Act 390 of the Emergency Management Act, Section 30.411 gives authorized emergency workers, volunteers, rescue workers and facilities immunity from liability for personal injury or damage to property.

13. Are school buses and bus drivers required to assist in an emergency?

A: Under Public Act 390 of the Emergency Management Act, Section 30.410(b) declare a local state of emergency. Subsection (c) Allows the county emergency manager to “appropriate funds, obtain and distribute equipment”. The drivers could not be forced to drive the buses.

14. If schools are closed in response to a public health order or emergency that would disrupt the school schedule, what accommodations might the Michigan Dept. of Education make in order to relieve the school districts of the responsibility to provide the required number of hours of instruction?

A: The required number of hours of instruction is legislatively mandated. Any waivers would require legislative action, probably after the fact.

15. Are there any examples of well written school district Emergency Preparedness Plans that others could use?

A: Yes we (Local Health Departments or MDE) have several examples that you could use.

16. How are school nurses being informed of their responsibilities?

A: School nurses are local district employees. The local district determines the duties of school nurses. This may vary significantly from district to district. School nurses also have a professional organization, the Michigan Association of School Nurses (MASN), to provide professional development, guidance, and ideas.

17. Should masks be worn?

A: The N-95 mask is the current recommendation for *health care providers*, in addition to this, gloves, gowns and hand sanitizer would be standard issued equipment for *health care workers*.

The issue regarding use of masks by the general public is currently being studied at the federal level, and we should receive more guidance about this in 2007. Sick people/children should not be going to work/school (the latter which may be closed due to a public health order).

18. How can school districts help students receive medical care?

A: This will require prior planning/coordination with local public health and health care providers.

If schools are closed as a public health measure, the regional medical control authorities and the local health jurisdictions may activate various supporting facilities should they be needed.

19. How can school personnel provide support for families experiencing an emotional crisis because of a pandemic flu outbreak?

A: Schools can provide referrals to local community agencies/groups for support. Several districts also have trained personnel who can deliver critical incident stress debriefing sessions for students, families, and staff.

20. What supports should be in place for the deaf student community?

A: Efforts should be made to assure that students will have access to print/visual materials that can provide basic information, as well as ongoing news bulletins, etc.

21. How can schools assist the migrant community in responding to a Pandemic Flu Outbreak?

A: This may be more of a community level decision, but having appropriately translated information sent home with children is

VERY helpful in communicating to parents. The Department of Human Services is interested in this issue as well, and also for refugees in our communities.

22. Is there any way the schools can or should provide support to students who depend on the school for breakfast and lunch on a daily basis?

A: This is going to require some advance planning/coordination at the local level. Having students return to a school setting defeats the purpose of social isolation, so solutions are going to need to be innovative to maintain social distancing and provide adequate nutrition.

23. Can schools provide packets or other home support to maintain a learning environment during a long-term school closure?

A: This would depend on the individual school system and their abilities. Some would be able to provide internet instruction but there are many homes that do not have internet and in home computers. In some of the rural areas many do not even have phones.

Superintendents at the state-level working group feel that school teachers may be able to develop packets should an impending closure be imminent, but this is very dependent upon ability of schools.

*Revised from original and distributed at the School Closing Tabletop Exercise
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