



Halifax Regional School Board – Pandemic Preparedness Plan

The Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) is committed to ensuring that all schools and workplaces are safe, and has therefore developed a pandemic preparedness plan.

A flu pandemic occurs when a novel virus which is virulent and easily transmitted infects humans. The world typically experiences three pandemics per century. The 20th century saw the Spanish flu (1918), the Asian Flu (1967) and the Hong Kong flu (1974). The World Health Organization (WHO) believes that the world is overdue for another pandemic. Since the spring of 2009, considerable attention has focused on the potential for the H1N1 virus (swine influenza) to be the source of the next pandemic. H1N1 reached pandemic in the summer of 2009 and as of August 31, 2009, the virus remains in a pandemic state worldwide.

WHO identifies the following as the pandemic cycle:

Period	Phase	Characteristics
Preparedness	Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. An influenza virus subtype that has caused human infection is present in animals.
	Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. However, a circulating animal influenza virus subtype poses substantial risk of human disease.
	Phase 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human infection(s) with a new subtype, but no human to human spread or at most rare instances in close contact only.
	Phase 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small cluster(s) with limited human to human transmission but spread is highly localized, suggesting the virus is not well adjusted to human hosts.
	Phase 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Larger cluster(s) but human to human spread still localized, suggesting the virus is adapting to humans, but may not yet be fully transmissible (substantial pandemic risk).
Response	Phase 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased and sustained transmission to the general public
Recovery	Phase 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return to pandemic preparedness period.

The HRSB has commenced planning internally and externally by:

- having staff attend workshops and conferences on this topic to provide the required background for planning;
- establishing a preparedness planning committee chaired by the Senior Staff Advisor;
- having department/locations commence the preplanning phase to ensure an appropriate preparedness level;
- meeting with all union groups to establish a consultative approach to pandemic planning; and
- consulting with the Department of Education and the Department of Health Promotion and Protection.

Will Schools Be Closed?

According to the WHO, the H1N1 virus has reached pandemic. As a result, the HRSB's pandemic preparedness plan is now active. The health and safety of students and staff remains a priority and will be closely monitored. We are advising students and staff to wash their hands regularly, practice good cough hygiene and to stay home from school and work if they are ill to prevent the spread of the H1N1 virus. HRSB expects staff and students to come to work/school if they are feeling well and able to resume normal daily activities. Enhanced cleaning will also occur at all schools and offices.

During the H1N1 pandemic, HRSB schools and offices will remain open. Senior Staff will follow the advice and guidance of the Department of Education, as well as provincial and local public health officials who have the expertise to assess the level of health risk posed by a specific situation.

Schools will monitor student and staff absenteeism and the HRSB will share this information with public health authorities so the progress of the virus can be monitored. Schools may close for operational reasons (no power, heat, limited staffing, etc.), but any decision to close schools or offices due to significant operational impact as a result of the pandemic will be made only after consultation with the Department of Education, as well as local public health authorities. It is also possible that the Medical Officer of Health may make recommendations regarding the closure of individual schools, or all schools.

In the event that the pandemic is having significant operational impacts in the HRSB, normal program expectations and service levels may not be met (i.e. bussing, special education).

Operations – Organizational Structure

In the event that the pandemic is having significant operational impacts in the HRSB, the following organizational changes will be made:

1. Senior Staff will be responsible for directing the system on a day-to-day basis.
2. A special committee called the Operations Committee will be formed. The Operations Committee shall consist of:

- Coordinator – Communication
- Coordinators – School Administration (2)
- Coordinator – Education Quality and Accountability
- Coordinator – Program and Student Services
- Coordinator – Human Resources
- Controller – Financial Services
- Coordinator – Property Services Custodial
- Coordinator – Property Services Maintenance
- Coordinator – Information Technology

It shall be the purpose of the Operations Committee to act as a resource and to make recommendations to the Senior Staff. The Operations Committee will be chaired by a Coordinator – School Administration (assigned by the Director – School Administration).

The establishment of an Operations Committee will have the effect of centralizing operations. It will ensure that a highly structured and directed mode of operations be followed. A secretary will be designated for the Operations Committee.

Role of the Senior Staff

1. To direct the overall operation of the system.
2. To receive reports from the Operations Committee.
3. To review the plan for the release of information as prepared by the Operations Committee and to authorize the sending of media releases.
4. To report to the Elected Board as to the operation of the system.
5. To determine the closing of any school(s) or offices due to excessive absenteeism.

Role of the Operations Committee

1. To monitor and make recommendations on the overall operation of the system on a daily basis.
2. To make a clear and complete assessment of situations that may arise in the board.
3. To act as a resource to Senior Staff.
4. To recommend courses of action to Senior Staff.
5. To help determine the substance of all news releases.
6. To act as an emergency resource for school-based and central office staff.

Active Monitoring

Active Monitoring is critical during a declared pandemic. Monitoring normal levels of absenteeism will allow us to determine when the situation has changed. Therefore, it is important that schools begin monitoring attendance and reporting it online beginning on September 21, 2009.

1. By 12:00 p.m each day, schools will complete a daily update report online. The information required will include absenteeism reports for students, teachers, administrators, EPAs, lunch monitors, food service staff, etc.
2. If any school experiences student absenteeism exceeding 10 percent OR absenteeism that is higher than baseline levels as determined by the school which is likely due to influenza-like illness (ILI) or another common illness, the school will inform their public health nurse. There is no need to report one confirmed case of influenza (*Updated October 16, 2009*).

In the event that the H1N1 pandemic is having significant impact on the operations of the Halifax Regional School Board, the Senior Staff will make a decision to move into operational mode.

Operational Mode

1. By 12:00 p.m. each day, schools will complete the daily update report online. The information required will include absenteeism reports for students, teachers, administrators, EPAs, lunch monitors, food service staff, etc.
2. If any school experiences a student absenteeism of 10 percent or greater, the school will inform their public health nurse.
3. School Administration will review the online report for each school and follow-up when information is missing.
4. Schools will contact their Supervisor – School Administration regarding any issues or concerns. It shall be the responsibility of the Coordinators – School Administration (2) to ensure that there is always a Supervisor – School Administration available to respond to an emergency situation.
5. Stock Transportation will update the Director – Operations Services regarding any transportation issues that may affect schools.
6. The Regional Supervisors – Operations Services will update the Coordinator – Property Services Custodial regarding custodial absenteeism.
7. Requests by the media regarding H1N1 will be referred to and received by the Coordinator – Communications.
8. The Superintendent or designate shall be consulted in all cases in which an emergency decision must be made regarding the operation of a school or office. This will ensure that appropriate consultation with the Department of Education and public health officials occurs and issues will be handled in a consistent manner in the system. Direction will be provided by the Director – School Administration, or designate, to principals which will detail procedures to be followed.

9. From 12:30 - 2:00 p.m. each day, the full Operations Committee will review the data that has been received. The Committee will make assessments of situations and will develop a series of recommendations for Senior Staff. In addition, news releases (substance) will be determined. The Committee shall decide how to handle specific media requests as identified by the Coordinator of Communications.
10. At approximately 2:30 p.m. each day, the Chair of the Operations Committee will meet with Senior Staff.
11. At approximately 3:00 p.m., any communication to schools will be released.
12. At approximately 3:30 p.m., any media releases or interviews will occur.

Information Items

It is the intention of the HRSB to conduct its affairs in accordance with board policies and operating procedures.

The following is for information as to what the intention of the administration will be once it is determined that the pandemic is having a significant impact on the operations of the HRSB. The intention is that:

1. Board Meetings – meetings of the elected Board will be held as scheduled and more frequently if necessary, but may be held electronically.
2. Casual Staff – departments will engage casual staff to ensure appropriate levels of coverage to support the ongoing opening of school(s) and offices.
3. Continuing Education – night school, summer school and Adult ESL programs may be cancelled.
4. Courier Services – will operate as usual.
5. Essential Maintenance Services – sufficient contractors in the areas of heating, air conditioning and controls, electric, plumbing, P.A. systems, fire alarms, program bells, structural (i.e. glazing repairs), roofing, security alarms, snowplowing & sanding/salting, grass cutting, locksmith services and computer repair have been contracted and we expect to have adequate resources in the event of any emergency which should be reported by the principal or designate to Maintenance Services.
6. EXCEL – if schools are open, the EXCEL program will continue to operate. If schools are closed, EXCEL will not operate.
7. Extracurricular Activities – extracurricular activities may be cancelled.
8. Facility Rentals – after hours activity/access to schools may be cancelled.
9. Field Trips – field trips may be cancelled.
10. Garbage Collection – the normal process for garbage collection will be maintained.

11. Home and School meetings – home and school meetings (i.e. parent-teacher organizations) may be cancelled.
12. Home Tutoring Programs – home tutoring instruction may be cancelled.
13. Instruction/Evaluation/Reporting – where possible, the regular instructional program and those activities related to instruction, evaluation and reporting will continue.
14. Maintenance – the normal procedure shall continue (i.e. emergency calls will be directed to Maintenance Services with a follow-up to the Facilities Manager as soon as possible). Maintenance items, which are not of an emergency nature, should be communicated by telephone to the Facilities Manager in the normal manner. Board staff and outside contractors will be used for all types of emergency maintenance and routine maintenance may be suspended.
15. Meetings – meetings with large groups will only be held as necessary. Meetings that take administrators or staff out of school will either be cancelled or held electronically.
16. Printing – the Print Shop will continue to operate as normal, provided sufficient staff is available. Items related to pandemic communications will be given the highest priority.
17. Professional Development Activities – all professional development activities and attendance at conferences will be reviewed and may be cancelled.
18. Purchasing – the normal process for order and delivery of supplies and materials will be maintained provided there is sufficient purchasing staff available.
19. Safe Arrival – all schools will continue their safe arrival programs. Student absence information will be critical.
20. School Advisory Councils – principals will develop a plan for ongoing communication with the Chair of their School Advisory Council. School Advisory Council meetings at the school or district level may be cancelled.
21. School Trips – school trips will be reviewed and may be cancelled in light of travel advisory reports or at the advice of the Department of Education or public health.
22. Security of Facilities – while schools are open, security of facilities will continue in accordance with current procedures. In the event that schools are closed, security patrols will be scheduled for all affected buildings.
23. Student Transportation – subject to daily review, busses will maintain regular schedules while schools remain open.
24. Substitute Teachers – school principals will engage substitute teachers to ensure appropriate levels of coverage and supervision in schools.
25. Volunteers – the present practice regarding volunteers in schools will be reviewed on a regular basis.
26. Website – information on pandemic planning will be posted on the HRSB website (www.hrsb.ns.ca) on a regular basis as new information becomes available.