

HEALTH & SAFETY

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Workplace flu pandemic plans crucial

The H1N1 flu strain that emerged from Mexico has spread to the United States, Europe and elsewhere. In New York City, several schools have been closed and an assistant principal has died from the virus.

The fact that it has proved able to spread quickly between humans has raised fears of the possibility of a flu pandemic. Many countries have stepped up surveillance at airports and ports, using thermal cameras and sensors to identify people with fever, and the World Health Organization has opened its 24-hour "war room" command center.

After consulting with flu experts from around the world, WHO raised its pandemic alert level to 5, on a scale of 1 to 6. A phase 5 alert means there is sustained transmission among people in at least two countries.

Planning

Has your district, campus or facility completed its pandemic flu planning?

Pandemic/H1N1 flu Web site resources

NYS Education Department info for schools and colleges:
<http://usny.nysed.gov/swine-flu-info.html>

U.S. Department of Education Web page, which has great resources for K-12 and higher ed: www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/pandemic/index.html

CDC Web site with specific sections for workplace, schools (including colleges) and health care with checklists for guidance: www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/index.html

The CDC Web page for health care settings:
www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/healthcare/index.html

OSHA Web site on pandemic flu planning:
www.osha.gov/dsg/topics/pandemicflu/index.html

Has it been practiced? Three years ago this newsletter featured an article about pandemic flu planning. Too many employers have neither completed comprehensive pandemic plans nor tested them through activities like table top exercises. With luck, this outbreak will remain largely mild, but individuals and workplaces can't wait should this or a future outbreak result in widespread serious illness and fatalities.

Use this time to revisit pandemic plans and make sure federal and state resources have been considered to ensure comprehensive planning. NYSUT locals need to keep in mind that there are workplace health and safety and employment issues involved in pandemic planning. Visit www.nysut.org and go to the health and safety page under "Resources" for a fact sheet on union issues in pandemic planning to help protect your members. There is also a fact sheet to help you in planning at home.

Protecting yourself at work

AFT released an advisory with important policy recommendations:

- Communicate good practice to all staff, students and parents.
- Exclude sick staff and children from school.
- Quickly refer children with acute respiratory symptoms to the nurse for assessment and possible isolation.



- Provide additional support to teach and encourage hand hygiene (soap and water, opportunities to wash hands and alcohol-based sanitizing gel).
- Address the status of employees if the system closes.
- Clean all classrooms, cafeterias and lunchrooms, bathrooms, gymnasiums and other common areas.

Other steps the union can take include:

- monitoring the status of running water, soap and towels in bathrooms; and
- monitoring ventilation and working with the district to increase ventilation either by opening windows or increasing outside air in mechanical systems.

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Representing more than 600,000 professionals in education and health care
For more, see www.nysut.org.

H&S confab brings activists together

NYSUT's 2009 Health and Safety conference was held in Saratoga Springs March 6 and 7. Attended by 190 local leaders and health and safety activists, the conference was a great success. Starting with workshops on Friday afternoon, NYSUT members from around the state were enthusiastic about the opportunity to talk to their peers and learn new information.

The keynote speaker was Dr. David Michaels, research professor and associate chairman in the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health at the George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services. Michaels, a former assistant secretary for energy in the Clinton administration, gave a perspective on national initiatives on workplace health and safety. He pointed out that the change in administration brought a return to policy making based on good science.

Jan Montesano, a member of the Ballston Spa Teachers Association, was honored with NYSUT's newly established



Alex Donnell from Bethlehem Central Teachers Association gets advice from AFT Health and Safety Assistant Director Mike Lohman.

Health and Safety Unsung Heroes Award, which recognizes activism and advocacy.

There were many new attendees at the conference, but long-time activists like Tony Costa from New Rochelle FUSE were also in abundance. "The

whole experience was great," said Costa. "I felt I gained a lot of knowledge and everyone I talked to was very positive. Because of the location, workshops and speakers it was probably the best conference I ever attended."

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Worker advocate appointed at OSHA

On April 8, U.S. Labor Secretary Hilda Solis named Jordan Barab, senior labor policy adviser for health and safety for the House Education and Labor Committee, OSHA's deputy assistant secretary and acting assistant secretary effective April 13. His experience includes working for the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board from 2002-07 and spending 16 years running the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees health and safety program. In 1998, he was appointed a special assistant to the assistant secretary for OSHA, where he served as national labor liaison and ergonomics coordinator. Barab also ran the Confined Space blog from March 2003 to January 2007, where he discussed occupational health and safety issues.

Barab wrote about health and



Kathleen M. Donahue

safety in his "farewell" Confined Space blog post on Jan. 24, 2007: "And there are still far too many health and safety professionals that don't understand that to a very great extent, who lives and who dies in the workplace is determined by politics — both power relationships in the workplace and traditional politics that determines who controls our government. What that means is that organizing unions and electing politicians who will fight against unlimited corporate control over our regulatory agencies, our workplaces and the environment are of vital importance to protecting the health and safety of American workers."

"This is great news for workers and union members," said NYSUT Vice President Kathleen Donahue. "We are particularly pleased about Barab's extensive public sector union experience. Public sector health and safety problems have gotten little attention from OSHA and millions of public workers across the United States have no OSHA protection at all."

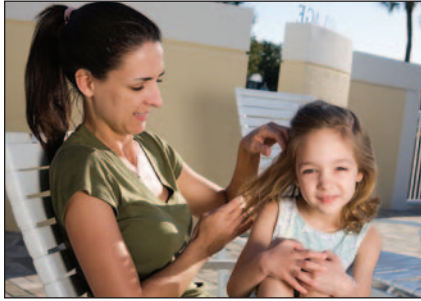
Head lice: Kids with nits can attend school

Adapted from AFT Health & Safety

Students with head lice nits (lice eggs) are not necessarily being sent home from school, in part because of the loss of classroom time for the students and inconvenience to working parents, reports the Associated Press. AP in February reported that as long as youngsters with nits do not have crawling lice in their hair, many schools are now allowing the affected students to stay in the classroom. This is in part due to recommendations by the American Academy of

Pediatrics and the National Association of School Nurses that students with nits shouldn't be kept out of class.

Linda Julia, a member of the NYSUT Task Force on Health and Safety and a school nurse in Candlewood



Middle School in Half Hollow Hills, said adult lice are a problem especially if the children have had treatment, which includes a special shampoo and thorough combing. She is seeing a significant increase in lice problems in the district. It seems to stem from a couple of problems: The kids with lice are in households that have had recurring lice problems and the lice have developed resistance to the shampoo. Adding to the situation is the fact that students are not blow-drying their hair as much as they used to. The heat from blow-drying helps kill the nits and lice.

Julia says that the school nurse checks the students after they've been treated but if they still have multiple nits, the nurse will send them home for further treatment.

Education of the family is crucial. There must be proper treatment of family members and good housekeeping to eliminate the problem. In extreme cases where students have chronic nit and lice infestation, she will refer the case to the school social worker.

More information about head lice and school policies is posted on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site at www.cdc.gov/lice/head/faqs.html and includes special links (in the left-hand navigation) for schools and parents.

The tips below are from Prevention, Control and Treatment of Head Lice Infestations in Schools published by the Wisconsin Division of Health.

Cleaning recommendations for lice problems at school

- Floors, rugs, pillows and upholstered furniture should be thoroughly vacuumed. There is no need to discard the vacuum bag after cleaning, except for aesthetic purposes.
- Combs and brushes used on infested persons should be immersed in water hotter than 130 degrees F, a disinfectant, rubbing alcohol or a pediculicide for one hour.
- Clothing, linen and cloth toys handled or worn by the infested individual within two days before diagnosis should be washed in water hotter than 130 degrees F, or machine dried at the hottest setting for at least 20 minutes.
- Other articles may be dry-cleaned, or sealed in plastic bags for at least 10 days.
- It is not necessary to hire an exterminator to treat the school.
- Spraying or fogging schools with insecticides or pediculicides is not recommended, and may be harmful if used in a poorly ventilated area.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

STATE

A 2136 (John); S 2124 (Golden): Establishes workplace violence prevention programs in schools in order to ensure a safe work/learning environment for all. The bill takes out the exclusion of K-12 workers from existing law and regulation.

S 3322 (Oppenheimer): Makes provisions to protect indoor air quality, including plans by building owners and air quality standards and investigations.

S 3324 (Stewart-Cousins): Establishes a maximum temperature in school buildings and indoor facilities (95 degrees). NYSUT will be asking for some revisions on the bill to be more protective of students and staff.



FEDERAL

H.R. 748 (Scott) Bill to establish a Center for Campus Public Safety. In February the House approved creation of an office in the Justice Department to help university security forces train for and prevent violent incidents such as those that hit Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University in recent years. The center would issue grants to campus safety agencies, encourage research into improved college safety and conduct training.

The bill is currently in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

H.R. 2067 (Miller) Protecting America's Workers Act: Expands OSHA coverage to include state and local public employees and federal government workers and to millions of other workers inadequately covered, such as airline and railroad employees, and Department of Energy contractors. The bill also proposes to strengthen penalties, improve whistleblower protections and allows workers and their families rights that would hold dangerous employers accountable.

The bill was recently introduced.



Cleaning product giant to phase out dangerous ingredient

SC Johnson took an important step in reducing toxic exposures from common products. It will provide ingredient information for all of its air freshener and home cleaning products and it will phase out its remaining use of phthalates, a class of hazardous chemicals. While disclosing chemical ingredients on air freshener or bathroom cleaner labels doesn't mean those ingredients have been studied and found to be safe, it is a critical first step. Most important, consumers can make informed decisions.

Phthalates — which may disrupt hormone functioning, cause abnormalities in sexual organs and lead to male infertility — are commonly used to

make plastic more flexible or carry fragrance in products. While the European Union has laws banning the use of certain phthalates, here in the United States manufacturers don't even have to list them on their labels.

SC Johnson's recent announcement will help change that. Consumers will be able to find out which ingredients are in the cleaners and air fresheners they use by reading the labels, going to a Web site (in English and Spanish), or using a toll-free number. They will also know SC Johnson products are free of phthalates starting in 2012.

Patty Wood, of Long Island's

Grassroots Environmental, said it was commendable that SC Johnson is taking steps to disclose the chemical ingredients in its products. "It is also important to add to that list the chemicals that are byproducts of certain chemical combinations, some of which can present very significant health risks, said Wood. "We need assurance that there are no chemicals we use to clean that can put our families at risk."

Public demand for more information about unsafe chemicals in household products really helped drive the company's action. Consumers can make a difference.



WEB RESOURCES

AFT green survey

AFT wants to know what "going green" means in your school. Tell them about your initiatives, programs, and classroom activities that you and your students are doing to study the principles of environmental sustainability/energy efficiency, or efforts to implement environmentally sound and healthy practices in your school.

AFT plans to use your ideas on their Web site and in other AFT publications to help educators and school staff "go green." Give your input: www.aft.org/greensurvey.



School employee wellness guide

This guide for protecting the assets of our nation's schools provides information, practical tools and resources for school employee wellness programs. It will help schools, school districts and states develop and support the implementation of school employee wellness programs that promote employee health, improve workforce productivity and reduce the costs of employee absenteeism and health care. See www.schoolempwell.org.



New MRSA materials available

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently issued new resources on the MRSA staph infections. Materials include brochures, fact sheets, posters, Web graphics and a treatment algorithm related to MRSA skin and soft tissue infections. Visit the MRSA Skin Infections — National MRSA Education Initiative at: www.cdc.gov/mrsa.

Disaster planning for people with disabilities

The Nobody Left Behind Project has updated resources for disaster preparedness and assistance for persons with disabilities available at www.nobodyleftbehind2.org.



Doctor Fungus online

While intended for physicians, this Web site has much information for the educated lay audience. The nonprofit site is updated and reviewed by an international team of pathologists, mycologists, pharmacologists and other specialists. Sections include "Learn About Fungi" and "Think You Have a Sick Building?" and many others. Explore at www.doctorfungus.org/.



DVD for mold remediation

After hurricanes Katrina and Rita, a group of community partners, including Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health produced a DVD with clear instructions on flood-related mold remediation for homeowners, volunteers and small-scale contractors. Useful for anyone with flood-related water damage.

You can watch or download Mold Clean-Up Guidance for New Orleans Area Residents at www.centerforhealthyhousing.org/html/katrina_video.htm.

