

Creating a Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan: A Guide for Child Care Centers and Family Child Care Homes

This document provides pandemic flu planning guidance to help decrease the impact of a pandemic on your center and the children in your care. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) developed this pandemic flu planning guide in collaboration with the American Academy of Pediatrics, and with contributions from Child Care Aware of America. Key elements included in this document were adapted from the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (NRC) [Standards from *Caring for Our Children*](#).¹

How to Use This Guide:

Whether your center already has a seasonal and/or pandemic flu plan or not, you may find useful elements in this guide to include with your plan. The user-friendly sections are designed to help your child care center organize a pandemic flu preparedness plan.

Section 1: Introduction to Pandemic Flu

Section 2: Planning & Preparing

Section 3: Communicating & Implementing Your Plan

Section 4: Infection Control

Section 5: Additional Resources

Each section contains suggested activities, checklists and fillable worksheets to help navigate the planning process, and space to include notes and completion dates for each task. This guide allows staff members to think about the necessary actions appropriate for your center, and steps to fully implement your child care center's pandemic flu preparedness plan.

Section 1: Introduction to Pandemic Flu

The responsibilities of running a child care center are immense. During a public health emergency, like an influenza (flu) pandemic, child care center services will be needed. A flu pandemic is a global outbreak of a new flu virus that infects most people because they have no previous exposure to the new virus, and adjustments may have to be made in center operations to meet the demands of the emergency. According to a 2016 survey conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), more than 90% of child care centers do not have a plan to prepare for and respond to a flu pandemic.² Taking the time to plan for pandemic flu will help your center develop strategies to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of children and staff at your center.

Why do I need to develop a plan to prepare my child care center for pandemic flu?

If a flu pandemic occurs, your center will likely have to deal with a high number of sick children, staffing shortages, the closing of child care centers by public health officials, and lost revenue

associated with center closure. Steps you take today to prepare for a flu pandemic will help save lives, keep staff and children healthier and safer, and keep the business functions of your center on solid ground.

How is pandemic flu different from seasonal flu?

Flu pandemics happen when new flu viruses appear that are unrelated to current flu viruses in humans and infect large numbers of people around the world. People get sick because they have little or no immunity to a virus they have not been previously exposed to, so the virus spreads easily from person to person. No one knows what virus will cause the next pandemic, so when a flu pandemic begins, there likely will not be a vaccine to protect people against the specific pandemic virus for at least a few months. Flu pandemics are different from seasonal flu, which happens annually. During [seasonal flu](#) people usually have some immunity from previous flu virus infections and/or annual flu vaccination. The last flu pandemic was in 2009. During that time, a new virus emerged (“2009 H1N1”) that spread quickly across the U.S. and the world. CDC estimates 151,000-575,000 deaths occurred worldwide. ³

How dangerous is pandemic flu to children?

During the [2009 H1N1 flu pandemic](#), 358 pediatric deaths were reported to CDC. Both healthy people, as well as [high-risk persons](#) (such as children younger than 5 years of age, people 65 and older, pregnant women, and others with certain chronic medical conditions), may be at high risk for serious complications after being infected. Children younger than 6 months are too young to get a flu vaccine, but they are at high risk of serious flu complications and hospitalization, compared to children of other ages. Protecting them from flu is especially important.

Child care centers, and small and large family child care center program managers and staff, can play an important role in reducing the risk of flu exposure among children and staff. A key step to take in your pandemic flu preparedness planning efforts is to follow or create a plan for preventing and controlling seasonal flu and encourage annual flu vaccination. All staff caring for any child(ren) should receive an annual flu vaccination each year, preferably by the end of October, but vaccination efforts should continue for as long as flu viruses are circulating. While seasonal flu outbreaks can happen as early as October, flu activity is highest between December and February during most seasons, although activity can last as late as May. In the event of a flu pandemic, staff should receive a vaccine specific to the pandemic virus, such as the vaccine used during the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic, once it is available.

1. <http://nrckids.org/CFOC> Chapter 9: Administration, 9.2 Policies, 9.2.4.4: Written Plan for Seasonal and Pandemic Influenza; and Related Standards and Appendices
2. Shope T, Walker B, Aird L, Southward L, McCown J, Martin J. Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Among Child Care Center Directors in 2008 and 2016. *Pediatrics Online* 2017 May 15. DOI: 10.1542/peds.2016-3690. <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2017/05/11/peds.2016-3690.full.pdf>
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/2009-h1n1-pandemic.html>

Section 2: Planning & Preparing

Tips for getting started:

- ✓ Locate state and local health departments, agency contacts, and [organizations that regulate child care centers](#) and their pandemic flu plans. Contact them to learn more about their pandemic flu plans in order to help you develop yours. *Use the attached Preparing for Pandemic Influenza at our Center (fill in template) and include with your plan.*

- ✓ Invite staff, parents, and your child care health consultant (if you have one) to attend a meeting about annual planning for seasonal and pandemic flu events. Share [influenza materials](#) that re language and reading level appropriate. Ask parents and staff for ideas to include in the plan. (Tip: A child care health consultant can help carry out the activities in this guide.)
- ✓ Review the state licensed and/or regulated emergency requirements.

Reflective Questions

Consider selecting some of these questions as a way to guide the process of creating your preparedness plan. These questions can also be used to facilitate discussions with parents and staff involved in the planning process:

- What can staff and parents do to keep their families healthy, especially during the annual flu season?
- How can seasonal flu planning help pandemic preparedness?
- What are the types of program closures and who is authorized to close programs?
- Local public health officials may recommend that local schools and child care centers temporarily close during a pandemic to help slow the spread of the pandemic flu virus. How would you plan for an orderly closure of your center, if it becomes necessary?
- How will your program continue influenza related communication messages during a pandemic flu event?
- How will the business function of your center be prepared to handle financial hardships of a pandemic event that could last several weeks to several months?
- What are ways your program can save additional funds to help through a temporary closing?
- How can your program plan for sick children and staff absences?
- How will you handle basic daily functions if changes to the program become necessary such as continuing payroll when attendance is low or the center is closed, paying bills, purchasing additional supplies, etc.?
- How will you support families in continuing their child's learning activities if the center is closed?
- How can you give parents ideas about where they might seek help for alternate childcare in your area?
- How will your team make changes to the plan for a more serious outbreak or in the event of a flu pandemic?
 - How will your team manage the continuous review and updating of your plans over time?

Creating Your Plan

- **Identify key contacts**
 - State/Local Health Department
 - State/Local Professional Development Provider (for example: Child Care Resource & Referral Network)
 - Child Care Health Consultant
 - Local immunization clinics
 - Mental Health consultants and other organizations that help staff, children, and families deal with stress/problems caused by a pandemic.
 - Meal services for low-income families receiving subsidized meals
 - Back-up staff, Substitute Teachers, and Temporary Staffing Agencies
 - Create a list of suppliers of goods & services to reschedule deliveries if necessary

- Identify secondary sources for key materials and supplies in case your primary source is unable to make deliveries during a pandemic.
- **Prepare for a potential closure**
 - Identify who in your community is authorized to close child care centers during a public health emergency or pandemic.
 - Create a call down list of staff, to notify of closure if necessary
 - Work with key staff to develop a process (phone tree, text or email alerts, etc.) to remain in communication with staff and parents during the annual flu season and in the event of a flu pandemic. Update your contact list regularly to account for staff changes and changes in enrollment in your program.
 - Plan how you will continue influenza related communication messages during a pandemic flu event.
- **Create procedures to help prevent and control the spread of influenza**
 - Plan how to protect high risk groups including [young children](#) less than 5 years (especially those less than 2 years) and children of any age with [chronic medical conditions](#) from developing serious flu-related complications.
 - Develop a plan for keeping children who become ill at the child care center away from other children until a family member arrives to pick them up.
 - Establish and enforce guidelines or sick policies to keep children who might have flu at home.
 - Develop guidelines to encourage and support staff members to remain home if they think they might have flu. Explore if there is a means to provide paid sick leave so that staff can stay home until completely well without losing wages.
- **Stay Organized**
 - Identify and update the list of children or staff who have special needs and health conditions and include this information in your plans.
 - Combine your pandemic flu plan with your other emergency preparedness plans, as well as your staff handbook.
 - Remember to review your plan annually with staff and parents. Continuous review and updating of your plans will better prepare your staff and families!

Section 3: Communicating & Implementing Your Plan

Refining the Plan with Staff

- Select a meeting date with plenty of advanced time to prepare and notify staff of the plan.
- Review the reasons for needing a plan and be prepared to answer any questions or concerns.
- Describe reasons why seasonal flu planning can help pandemic preparedness.
- Review the steps your center takes to be prepared for seasonal flu with staff before, during, and after a flu season
- Discuss how your team will make changes to the plan for a more serious outbreak or in the event of a flu pandemic.
- Describe how sick children and staff will be separated from others and who will care for them until they can go home.
- Communicate with other child care programs in your area to share information and resources. Develop a system to share staff or pool substitutes, or join with other child care centers to pay for a child care health consultant to hold a pandemic flu workshop for staff members.

- Make sure that staff have read and understand your seasonal flu and pandemic flu plans. Require all staff to review these plans annually.
- Remember to share information and plans with substitute staff and volunteers.

Communicating the Plan with Families

- Select a meeting date with plenty of advanced time to prepare and notify staff of the plan.
- Have a friendly discussion and ask what parents do to keep their families healthy, especially during the annual flu season. Use this time to educate staff and parents about the importance of annual flu vaccination, and the reasons that children and workers need to stay home if they are ill with the flu.
- Review the reasons for needing a plan and be prepared to answer any questions or concerns.
- Describe reasons why seasonal flu planning can help pandemic preparedness.
- Review the steps your center takes to be prepared for seasonal flu with staff before, during, and after a flu season
- Discuss how you will continue influenza related communication messages during a pandemic flu event or closure.
- Encourage and remind parents/guardians to have a back-up plan for care of their children if the program is closed. Include this information in the parent handbook, discuss upon enrollment in your program, and review/update annually prior to flu season.
- Make sure that parents have read and understand your seasonal flu and pandemic flu plans. Require all families to review these plans annually.

Establishing Communication from the Start

Preventing and controlling seasonal flu is the best way to minimize impact to your child care business and can help you plan and prepare for pandemic flu. Share information with families year-round through your routine announcements, newsletter, and flyers on the following topics:

- The benefits of annual influenza vaccination for all children aged 6 months and older.
- Seasonal flu vaccination recommendations from AAP and CDC for parents and pregnant women
- Staff and parents with any child who is sick with any respiratory symptoms, with or without fever, should be kept at home to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including flu viruses, to other children
- High-risk groups include young children less than 5 years (especially those less than 2 years) and children of any age with [chronic medical conditions](#) (including asthma, neurologic and neurodevelopmental conditions, heart disease, diabetes, etc.) should receive a flu shot. See.
- Infection control policies and procedures (See Section 4).
- Universal precautions including proper handwashing, sanitization, and tips for reducing the spread of illness.

Remember: Share reliable information with staff and children’s families in their spoken language and at a reading level that is comfortable for them. Download and make copies of resource materials listed in this guide and share them with staff, parents, and children, as appropriate. (See SECTION 5: RESOURCES)

Section 4: Infection Control

Refer to your center's policy guidelines to help limit the spread of flu and to keep your center operating during the annual flu season and/or a flu pandemic. Include procedures in your preparedness plan to help prevent and control the spread of influenza:

Prevention and Control

- Practice daily health checks of children and staff each day for illness.
- Ensure that all staff practice [good health habits](#) to help stop the spread of flu and follow usual infection control precautions. Directors should complete a handwashing checklist during their routine staff observations to ensure proper technique is used.
- Keep adequate supplies of items to control the spread of flu such as soap, hand sanitizers, cleaning products and disinfectants, tissues, etc. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects contaminated with germs like the flu.
- Protect [children younger than 5 years](#). Children less than 6 months, including children less than 2 years are at highest risk for complications from influenza.
- Protect children especially those who are younger than 6 months of age and children with chronic health conditions:
 - Keep infant toys separate from toys for older children and sanitize infant toys daily.
 - Talk to parents and ask that they practice and enforce infection control behavior (e.g., handwashing) at home with older children.
 - People with flu can spread it to others up to about 6 feet away. If possible, keep older children and activities at a distance from children younger than 6 months and those with chronic health conditions. (**NOTE:** Allow only healthy staff and parents in the area.)
 - Minimize group sizes to fewer than 6 children, and make sure groups consist of the same children each day.
- Appoint staff to ensure and maintain accurate records when children or staff are ill with details regarding symptoms and the kind of illness.

Teaching Staff, Children, and Families

- Teach staff, children, and parents how to protect against flu.
- Educate staff and families about the importance of annual vaccination against seasonal flu. Explain that during a flu pandemic, it will be important to receive a pandemic-specific vaccine (such as the one used during the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic) as soon as it becomes available.
- Learn more about different [flu vaccines and how they work](#)

Additional training and educational materials and resources are listed on the next page.

Section 5: Resources

Training and Education

- [Pandemic Influenza](#)
- [General Information on Seasonal Influenza](#)
- [Flu Symptoms and Complications](#)
- [Children and Influenza \(Flu\) High Risk](#)
- [Information for Schools and Child Care Providers](#)
- [Influenza Prevention and Control – Strategies for Early Education and Child Care Programs](#)
- [Get Your Community Ready for Pandemic Influenza Using Nonpharmaceutical Interventions](#)
- [How to Care for Someone Sick with Flu](#)

Low-cost Vaccines and Health Clinic Locators

Share information and resources for low-cost or free flu vaccines with staff and families. Explain how they can get a flu shot if they do not have health insurance or cannot afford the vaccine.

- [Directory of Local Health Departments in the U.S.](#)
- [Find a Community Health Center Near You](#)
- [Vaccine Finder](#)
- [MedFinder](#)

Communication Resources

- [Flu Prevention Resources for Use in Schools and Child Care](#)
- [Family and Children Flu Prevention Materials](#) (fact sheets, posters, flyers)
- [Influenza Materials](#)
- [Multilingual Seasonal Flu Materials for Immigrants and Refugees](#)

PREPARING FOR PANDEMIC INFLUENZA AT OUR CENTER

Use this template to support your plan and make it available and visible to staff. Update as needed.

KEY CONTACTS	Name of Organization	Name & Title	Phone/Email
State/Local Health Department			
State/Local Professional Development Provider			
Child Care Health Consultant			
Immunization Clinics			
Mental Health Consultant			
Mental Health Clinics			
Meal Services			
Back-Up Suppliers			
Temporary Staffing Agencies			
Substitute Teachers			
Other Contacts			

PREPARING FOR PANDEMIC INFLUENZA AT OUR CENTER

Use this template to create a list of suppliers of goods and services to call in the event of a business closure.

EMERGENCY CLOSING CALL DOWN LIST Suppliers Contact Information

Supplier	Contact Name/Title	Phone/email

Notes:

Large empty rectangular area for notes.