

4B. Infectious Disease Tabletop Exercise

For information on how to conduct the tabletop exercise, see the accompanying resource “Tabletop Exercise Instructions.”

In this tabletop exercise, you should imagine that you are a member of your school’s emergency planning team and that you have access to only the resources and systems you currently have in place. You will discuss your response to an infectious disease outbreak—both the scenario and disease are hypothetical.

A scenario will first be presented to you, followed by individual questions. After each question is asked, you should pause the recording and discuss it with your group. Additional information on how the scenario unfolds, which are also called injects, and questions are then posed on how the school would respond.

Scenario and Questions/Injects

Scenario

Two weeks before the end the school year, you hear on the news that another country has witnessed cases of a new strain of H5N10 influenza, commonly known as horse flu. There is evidence that the strain of flu can pass from human to human. This can happen when an individual with the flu spreads droplets to another person through coughing, sneezing, or talking or when an individual touches a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touches their own mouth or nose. Observed symptoms include severe coughing, body aches, fatigue, and a high fever, and the incubation period is typically between 1 and 4 days.

During your end-of-year planning team meeting, one member brings up their concerns about the spread and impact of the horse flu. To help allay the member’s concern, how would you respond to the following questions?

1. Does your school or school district currently have established protocols on responding to public health, medical, or mental/behavioral health emergencies, such as infectious disease outbreaks? What are they? Where would you find this information, such as in a Public Health, Medical, and Mental Health Annex or an Infectious Disease Annex to the school emergency operations plan (EOP)? Is the information current, or does it need updating?
2. What courses of action do your EOP and annexes direct you to do before a health-related emergency? What actions can you take right now?

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3. How could this affect the school's or school district's education calendar and education requirements for next year, such as assessment and testing?

More specific information will now be presented with **Inject #1**.

Three months later, and 1 week before the start of the new school year, there are news reports that the horse flu has spread to the United States and cases have been observed in five states and territories, including yours. You are notified by your state/territorial and county public authorities that it is likely only a matter of time before your locality also observes cases of this type of flu. They tell both public and private schools to be on the lookout for cases of the flu and recommend that school and school district planning teams meet with their local public health partners to review their EOP and clarify roles and responsibilities. They are not currently recommending schools delay the start of the academic year.

A new nurse joins the school. In his orientation process, he mentions that he too has heard about the spread of the horse flu and he wants to learn more about the existing programs and plans the school has in place to address infectious diseases. The staff member providing the orientation turns to you to help answer some of his more specific questions.

Now, please answer the following questions he posed:

1. Do you have a surveillance system in place for absences? If so, how is it linked to the local public health authority, or an existing state or regional monitoring and surveillance system?
2. How would you enforce, or create if there are none, effective policies pertaining to: hand-washing, cough and sneeze etiquette, routine cleaning and sanitation, handling of animals in school or on field trips, and student vaccinations?
3. What additional strategies do you have to reduce the spread of an infectious disease, such as having lunchtime in the classrooms or alternating school dates, and what are the criteria for implementing them?
4. What protocols do you have in place with your local public health authority to collect and share information about threats to public health? To whom does your school or school district report a disease outbreak?
5. If the school or school district did need to close to help prevent the spread of an infectious disease, under what circumstances would that happen? Who would make the decision about closing the school or school district?



If you have questions or need additional assistance, please contact the REMSTA Center at
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Now that the team has discussed these questions, you'll hear how the scenario hypothetically unfolds with **Inject #2**.

Two months into the new school year, cases of the horse flu are reported in every state and territory. Approximately 5 percent of your student body has confirmed cases of the horse flu. Your local public health authority informs the school that children and adults should still get vaccinated against the seasonal flu, but it will likely not be effective against the horse strain of flu.

The health authority also provides the school with a set of questions that the secretary can ask a parent or guardian when confirming their child is sick. This includes whether a doctor has confirmed that the child has a case of the horse flu.

The health authority asks that the school regularly report on how many students, staff, and teachers are suspected of having the horse flu. They also state that they will continue to monitor the situation and may require your school or school district to close to help prevent the spread of the horse flu. While large gatherings are not prohibited, they are discouraged.

Due to the high number of students who are ill, you convene your planning and response teams. Now, answer the following questions:

1. What steps would you take if your local public health authority asked the school to temporarily close? What is the process for re-opening the school or reconvening students?
2. After a closure, what steps would your school take to ensure continuity of education, including teaching and learning, special education and related services, and school-based medical services and food programs, if provided? Do you have any established protocols for what to do, such as in the Continuity of Operations (COOP) Annex to your EOP?
3. What information would you share about your sick students, if at all? Who would you share this information with and how? Is this information included in your EOP, such as in a Communications and Warning Annex?
4. How will specific populations of the school be affected, such as those with disabilities or access and functional needs? How will you identify and address those needs?
5. How will you enforce exclusion guidelines consistently and adapt attendance policies as necessary? What is your school dismissal policy, and how will dismissals be handled?



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Now, we're moving on to **Inject #3**.

After a vaccine is created and the population begins getting immunized, rates of the horse flu begin to subside. Your local public health authority continues to provide you weekly updates and asks that schools and school districts continue their surveillance systems for a possible resurgence of the flu.

Again, answer the following questions:

1. What is the school's plan to continue monitoring students, teachers, and staff for a possible resurgence?
2. What emotional, social, or behavioral support would you provide to students, teachers, and staff who were impacted by the flu, such as students who became ill and are having difficulty fitting back into the school?

Exercise Conclusion

An exercise debrief—called a “hot wash”—should now be conducted, and an after-action report that identifies gaps, shortfalls, and lessons learned should be documented. You should consider:

1. What did the exercise demonstrate about how the school or school district would respond to this type of emergency event?
2. What went well in the exercise?
3. What lessons were learned?
4. What gaps in the school's or school district's EOP, including annexes, were identified?
5. How will the EOP and annexes be revised, if needed?
6. Who will be responsible for making these revisions?
7. When will these revisions be made by?