

DEALING WITH THE INFLUENZA PANDEMIC: A GUIDE FOR ESSENTIAL SERVICES IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND SCHOOL ORGANIZATIONS



Version 2.0

Québec 

DEALING WITH THE INFLUENZA PANDEMIC:
A GUIDE FOR ESSENTIAL SERVICES
IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS
AND SCHOOL ORGANIZATIONS

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all those who participated in developing this document, *Dealing with the Influenza Pandemic: A Guide for Essential Services in Educational Institutions and School Organizations*, particularly those individuals from the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the Ministère de la Sécurité publique and Services Québec. Their constructive suggestions and comments are greatly appreciated.

PREFACE

The Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) will be updating this guide on an ongoing basis so that it continues to reflect current information and decisions taken regarding the planning of essential services during the influenza pandemic. Each new version will be numbered and posted on the MELS Web site. The MELS regional offices will notify civil protection responders in educational institutions of any updates so that they can take the steps required.

In this document, the term “school organization” refers to school boards, while “educational institutions” designates schools at the preschool, elementary and secondary levels, vocational training centres, adult education centres, private schools, private colleges, government schools, college centres for the transfer of technology, CEGEPs and their constituents as well as universities and their constituents.

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, RECREATION AND SPORTS

For some years now, we have been hearing that an influenza pandemic was on the horizon. The threat is now a reality and we must take the necessary measures to deal with it.

A collective effort is required so that Québec can keep the impact of this pandemic on the population to a minimum. The government authorities are approaching this matter with the utmost seriousness and are strongly encouraging schools, Québec civil service and municipal governments to do likewise.



All educational institutions and school organizations are therefore invited to update and improve their response plans in order to manage the impact of the pandemic. Such an undertaking calls for major contributions from all stakeholders in terms of both time and human resources. I am aware of this. But the events that some educational institutions experienced in relation to Influenza A(H1N1) in the spring of 2009 have shown how vitally important this preparation is for effectively managing the situation.

Moreover, the strategies planned will not only be most useful in managing the pandemic, but will be equally effective should a disaster or major crisis occur. Unfortunately, we have seen many such incidents in Québec: floods, ice storms, earthquakes and other disasters have left painful memories and severely affected many people in various regions.

I am sincerely counting on your support. By implementing strategies to ensure that essential services are maintained during the pandemic, you will help reassure the public, which is crucial in such circumstances, and you will be in a position to continue to provide the best services possible to staff and students in educational institutions. They will most certainly be very grateful to you for having taken action at the appropriate time.

MICHELLE COURCHESNE

FOREWORD

This guide is intended to support educational institutions and school organizations in preparing a response plan for the measures to be applied during the influenza pandemic.

This response plan, in line with the government flu pandemic plan, which is coordinated by the Organisation de la sécurité civile du Québec (OSCQ), could also be used for any other disasters that might occur in Québec, such as an earthquake, flood or ice storm.

Educational institutions and school organizations must participate in this civil protection initiative and be prepared to deal with a pandemic. They must first and foremost be made to see the advantages of taking a preventive stance, of being adequately prepared to cope with emergency situations and disasters, and of having clear information on how they should proceed and conduct themselves at such times.

Please note that the measures proposed in this guide may be adapted, depending on how the pandemic and knowledge about it evolve.

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ORGANIZATION OF THE GUIDE

This guide outlines the elements that educational institutions and school organizations must address in their respective influenza pandemic response plans in order to ensure that services deemed essential are maintained. It contains concepts, principles and measures that are considered the minimum standard to be met when preparing and adopting a plan for managing the effects of an influenza pandemic.

Chapter 1 provides a definition of “influenza pandemic,” and Chapter 2 explains the roles and responsibilities of the main stakeholders in the health and civil protection sectors.

Chapter 3 deals with the preparedness of educational institutions and school organizations. The basic concepts associated with managing a pandemic—the strategies selected, the decision-making process and rules of governance—are covered in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 outlines the measures and principles related to each of the strategies selected, such as protecting the health of staff and students, maintaining services for staff and students, and minimizing the impact of the influenza pandemic.

Chapter 6 discusses the various aspects involved in planning for civil protection measures that educational institutions may be called upon to participate in during disasters other than an influenza pandemic.

Lastly, Appendix 1 contains a self-evaluation checklist of the main steps to be taken for each of the three periods of action associated with civil protection. Appendix 2 provides a tool for identifying flu symptoms.

CHAPTER 1

INFLUENZA PANDEMIC¹

WHAT IS AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC?

A pandemic is an epidemic that may occur in successive waves of several weeks over a relatively long period, and is not limited geographically. It may affect populations over several continents. Phenomena of this kind can have devastating effects for individuals and communities due to the high rates of illness, mortality and major psychosocial impacts associated with it, not to mention repercussions in all sectors of society. It is therefore critical to be adequately prepared to deal with such an event.

A predictable consequence of the influenza pandemic will be the absence of large number of staff and students from educational institutions. The major issue therefore consists in ensuring that the parties concerned will be able to continue providing educational services and maintaining essential services at all times so that the institution or board can run smoothly.

Sustained person-to-person transmission could exceptionally result in educational institutions being temporarily closed. Given the expected social and economic impacts involved, such a decision would be made in conjunction with regional public health authorities, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) and the regional civil protection organizations (Organisation de la sécurité civile du Québec, or ORSC) concerned, on the basis of information provided by the monitoring systems implemented by the various government departments.

REAL THREAT OF PANDEMIC

The four conditions required for the emergence of an influenza pandemic are as follows:

- the virus represents a new strain
- human beings have no immunity to this virus
- the virus is sufficiently virulent
- the virus can be transmitted from person to person

Currently, the H1N1 virus meets all the abovementioned conditions, and on June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that Influenza A(H1N1) had reached the stage of a global pandemic.

1. Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, *Summary—Québec Pandemic Influenza Plan—Health Mission*, September 4, 2007.
[\[http://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/acrobat/f/documentation/2005/05-235-06a.pdf\]](http://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/acrobat/f/documentation/2005/05-235-06a.pdf).

THE EFFECTS OF AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

In addition to the impact on the population's physical health, an influenza pandemic has strong potential to cause individual, family, social and psychosocial disruptions. Educational and recreational activities as well as most of society's activities would also be affected to varying degrees. Workplaces would also feel the repercussions of additional costs, higher absenteeism and reduced services.

FORECASTS TO SUPPORT PLANNING

For planning purposes, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) has adopted the hypothesis that the first wave of an influenza pandemic would affect 35 per cent of the population over an eight-week period.

This model, applied to Québec's population of 7.5 million, could result in the following scenario:²

- 2.6 million people would be infected
- 1.4 million people would need to consult a healthcare professional
- 34 000 people would be hospitalized
- 8 500 people could die

The first wave could be followed by a second, from three to nine months later. Other successive waves could arise, lasting from a few weeks to a few months.

WAITING PERIOD FOR A VACCINE

Vaccination is the most effective means of preventing influenza and avoiding the complications associated with it, but in a pandemic it takes several months to produce the vaccine. The areas of the world exposed to the infection early on will not have a vaccine at their disposal to fight the first wave of the pandemic. In Québec, as well as the rest of Canada, delaying the onset of the pandemic by a few months may enable us to have access to a vaccine. This scenario is possible, at least in theory.

Educational institutions must continue to educate staff and students and strongly encourage them to adopt basic hygiene measures such as hand washing and respiratory etiquette, as well as other general measures (limiting meetings, handshaking and embraces). These measures will help stem the spread of the virus.

2. *Idem.*

CHAPTER 2

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MAIN STAKEHOLDERS CONCERNED

HEALTH SECTOR

- **World Health Organization**

The World Health Organization (WHO) is monitoring the evolution and imminence of the pandemic throughout the world. It divides this evolution³ into three periods and six phases:

- The interpandemic period includes the first two phases and implies that no new virus has been detected in humans, despite there being outbreaks of new flu viruses that are more or less likely to cause human infection.
- The pandemic alert period is characterized by a new virus being identified in humans. It includes phases three, four and five, which cover the virus's varying ability to adapt to humans and be transmitted from person to person.
- The pandemic period itself (phase six) may occur in several waves and be followed by a postpandemic period. This marks a return to the interpandemic period.

These periods are indicators of the transmission of a new virus and its spread throughout the world. They do not indicate the degree of virulence of the virus.

- **Public Health Agency of Canada**

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is monitoring the evolution of the periods and phases established by the WHO as well as the evolution of the pandemic across the country. PHAC has developed a plan to fight the pandemic. It has joined forces with the provinces and the WHO to monitor the evolution of the situation and the behaviour of the virus.

- **Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux**

The Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) is monitoring the evolution of the periods and phases established by the WHO and the

3. Text extracted from or based on the document entitled *Québec Pandemic Influenza Plan—Health Mission*, Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, page 17, September 4, 2009. [<http://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/acrobat/f/documentation/2005/05-235-05a.pdf>].

pandemic situation in Québec. It is also responsible for the *Québec Pandemic Influenza Plan—Health Mission*, which details the issues surrounding an influenza pandemic and its potential effects on society as well as on the health and social services network. It sets out the broad lines of the health mission's planning, the basic principles of response, some 20 strategies, and a series of activities to be undertaken at the provincial level. The regional health and social services agencies have each developed a regional pandemic influenza plan (RPIP) and have also prepared local plans. During the pandemic, the director of public health will issue recommendations on the measures to be taken in accordance with the evolution of the situation and the degree of virulence of the virus in Québec.

CIVIL PROTECTION SECTOR

- **Québec Government**

The *Civil Protection Act* stipulates that in the event of a major disaster, for example a pandemic, the government may implement the *National Civil Protection Plan* (NCP), which is the management framework for all disasters in Québec. If necessary, it may declare a state of emergency in part or all of Québec in order to protect human life, health or property.

- **Ministère de la Sécurité publique**

The Ministère de la Sécurité publique (MSP) is responsible for coordinating the planning of government departments and agencies. Its *Plan gouvernemental en cas de pandémie d'influenza* complements the *National Civil Protection Plan*.

- **Comité de sécurité civile du Québec**

The deputy ministers and heads of the principal government departments and agencies involved in disaster management, as well as the government coordinator for civil protection, are members of the Comité de sécurité civile du Québec (CSCQ). Under the government's Secretary General, this committee provides direction for and approves government emergency preparedness planning. During a pandemic, the Secretary General supervises government actions and reports to the Premier of Québec.

- **Organisation de la sécurité civile du Québec**

The Organisation de la sécurité civile du Québec (OSCQ) brings together the civil protection coordinators of each government department and agency concerned. Under the government coordinator for civil protection, the OSCQ plans civil protection measures for all of Québec. In the event of a major disaster, such as a pandemic, it coordinates the operations carried out by each of the mission directors specified in the *National Civil Protection Plan*.

The MELS civil protection coordinator is a member of the OSCQ.

- **Organisation régionale de la sécurité civile**

The Organisation régionale de la sécurité civile (ORSC) brings together representatives of Québec government departments and agencies from the regions. The regional director for civil protection of the Ministère de la Sécurité publique coordinates government measures in a region in the event of a disaster.

MELS regional directors are members of the ORSC.

CHAPTER 3

PREPAREDNESS OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND SCHOOL ORGANIZATIONS

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The wide and rapid spread of influenza among the Québec population will pose a considerable challenge for the education system in terms of maintaining services for students.

Because of staff and student absenteeism, the main challenge will lie in maintaining school daycare services, quality educational services and administrative services to ensure that the educational institution will continue to run smoothly.

PERIODS OF ACTION ASSOCIATED WITH CIVIL PROTECTION

Civil protection is divided into four periods of action: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. The education sector must adopt specific measures or carry out specific activities during each of these periods. The influenza pandemic response plan must include these four periods. Prevention and preparedness will be covered together in the document because there may be overlap in the activities. The plan must also stipulate the actions that will be undertaken for each period.

The periods of action can be defined as follows:

- **Prevention** covers the measures adopted and the activities carried out on an ongoing basis that are designed to reduce or eliminate the risks associated with dreaded phenomena or events or to mitigate their potential impact.
- **Preparedness** involves activities and measures designed to strengthen the community's ability to respond effectively to disaster situations.
- **Response** includes the measures adopted immediately before, during and immediately after a disaster in order to protect human life, meet individuals' essential needs and safeguard property.
- **Recovery** consists of the decisions and activities undertaken following a disaster in order to restore the community's social, economic, physical and environmental conditions as well as to reduce the risk of disaster.

The following table shows how these periods of action relate to those established by the WHO.

WHO periods*	Phases	Description	Civil protection periods of action
Interpandemic	Phase 1	No new influenza virus subtypes detected in humans.	Prevention + preparedness
	Phase 2	A circulating animal virus poses a substantial risk of human disease.	
Pandemic alert	Phase 3	Human infection with a new subtype, but no human-to-human transmission or, at most, rare instances due to close and prolonged contact with infected birds.	Preparedness + response
	Phase 4	Limited and highly localized human-to-human transmission. Evidence of growing human-to-human spread.	
	Phase 5	Clusters of human-to-human transmission.	
Pandemic	Phase 6	Sustained human-to-human transmission in the population.	Response
Postpandemic	Return to the interpandemic period.		Recovery

Source : Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, *Québec Pandemic Influenza Plan—Health Mission*, page 18, August 26, 2009.
[\[http://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/acrobat/f/documentation/2005/05-235-05a.pdf\]](http://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/acrobat/f/documentation/2005/05-235-05a.pdf).

For educational institutions, the prevention and preparedness period should involve, for example, activities to raise awareness of general and personal hygiene measures.

During the response period, a monitoring system must be set up to track the number of students and staff in each educational institution who become infected and to communicate this information to MELS.

The recovery period can focus on ways of making up lost days so as to comply with the basic school regulations and training regulations, if applicable.

The following table presents the OSCQ's response actions according to the WHO phases for a pandemic breaking out elsewhere in the world. The degree of the OSCQ's involvement depends on both these phases and on the OSCQ's assessment of the situation in Québec.

WHO PHASES		OSCQ–RESPONSE ACTIONS
Interpandemic period		
1	Possibility of the presence of the virus in animals; low risk for humans	OSCQ MONITORING
2	A substantial risk of human disease posed by circulating animal virus	
Pandemic alert period		Context of VIGILANCE and potential risk: The OSCQ <u>prepares</u> for the risk of an influenza pandemic.
3	Human infection but no human-to-human transmission, or rare and limited instances	
4	Limited and highly localized human-to-human transmission	
5	High risk of pandemic: clusters of human-to-human transmission	POTENTIAL RISK with confirmation of human-to-human transmission, but no cases of infection with the new virus declared in Québec.
Pandemic period		The OSCQ <u>identifies</u> emerging issues and updates the strategy in the government's <i>National Civil Protection Plan</i> (NCP). The pandemic breaks out in Québec– RISK PRESENT in the province: declared cases of infection with the new virus Measures recommended by the MSSS and the OSCQ are <u>implemented</u> .
6	Sustained human-to-human transmission in the population	
Postpandemic period		RECOVERY: Measures for the return to normal activities are planned and carried out.
Return to the interpandemic period		

Source : Ministère de la Sécurité publique, *Plan gouvernemental en cas de pandémie d'influenza (PGPI-OSCQ)*, version 1.0.

CHAPTER 4

BASIC CONCEPTS IN MANAGING THE IMPACT OF AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

RULES OF GOVERNANCE ⁴

Three rules of governance should guide the conduct of all stakeholders during an influenza pandemic. These rules are interdependent, call on everyone to be vigilant and are in accordance with the emergency preparedness philosophy advocated by the Québec government within the framework of the *Civil Protection Act*, among others.

Protection

The first concern is protection: faced with a risk, stakeholders must protect themselves, protect others and encourage others to do the same.

Solidarity

The second concern is solidarity: in an emergency situation, stakeholders must assist others, ask for help if the situation requires it and encourage others to help, for the purposes of the common good.

Responsibility

The third concern is that of responsibility: in the event of an emergency, stakeholders continue their essential activities or try to find another solution, seek out information on the status of the situation as it relates to them, and follow instructions and advisories that concern them. Administrative procedures, such as those ensuing from collective agreements, will continue to apply.

The stakeholders' compliance with these three rules of governance as well as the sound management of the impacts of the pandemic will allow educational institutions to effectively fulfill their mission.

Moreover, in an influenza pandemic it is very important to show solidarity and responsibility. Decisions taken by one educational institution can have an impact on other Québec educational institutions, since staff or students

4. Ministère de la Sécurité publique, *Plan gouvernemental en cas de pandémie d'influenza (PGPI-OSCQ)*, page 14, version 1.0.
Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, *Québec Pandemic Influenza Plan—Health Mission*, page 30, August 26, 2009.
[\[http://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/acrobat/f/documentation/2005/05-235-05a.pdf\]](http://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/acrobat/f/documentation/2005/05-235-05a.pdf).

will ask for this decision to be applied to them.

For example, in the spring of 2009, during the outbreak of Influenza A(H1N1) in Québec, if an educational institution had decided to close due to confirmation that one of its students had been infected, despite a contrary recommendation by the public health authorities and MELS, this institution would have created a precedent for all other institutions with confirmed cases of infection. And these other institutions, although wishing to follow the recommendations of the public health authorities and MELS, might have ended up closing for several days under pressure from parents, staff and students, pointing out that one institution had already acted in such a manner.

Given the chain reaction such a decision can create and the considerable consequences in such a situation, it is essential to ensure consistency throughout the Québec school system by following the guidelines set out by the public health authorities of the MSSS and MELS.

Before making a decision associated with the pandemic, each school organization and each educational institution in Québec that does not possess a thorough knowledge of the guidelines for such a case should obtain the required information from its MELS regional office in order to avoid making decisions that do not correspond to the positions of the MSSS and MELS. Failure to do so could have grave consequences for other educational institutions and the smooth functioning of society in general.

STRATEGIES IN LINE WITH THE EDUCATION SECTOR'S MISSION

Educational institutions are first and foremost responsible for the organization and provision of educational services. In an influenza pandemic, they must focus primarily on the following three strategies:

- **Protect the health of staff and students**

Preventive measures must be implemented to limit the spread of influenza. Workplaces and premises used for teaching and daycare services must provide maximum protection against infection. In accordance with health advisories by MELS and Québec's public health authorities, educational institutions must apply measures that reduce the risk of contamination for staff and students.

- **Maintain student services**

Educational institutions offer school daycare services as well as educational services. As much as possible, all educational, administrative and daycare services will be offered according to staff availability.

In the event of significant staff shortages, those services deemed essential must be maintained. Measures for dealing with absenteeism will be applied and protective measures must be put in place if certain individuals with flu symptoms have to go to work to ensure that essential services are provided.

- **Minimize the organizational impacts of the pandemic**

Information concerning an influenza pandemic must be reliable and comply with guidelines issued by MELS and the MSSS and transmitted to educational institutions and school organizations by MELS. Suppliers, subcontractors and various partners (school bus companies, catering services, etc.) must be mobilized and informed of these guidelines.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS: THE CHALLENGE OF BEING EFFECTIVE

During a pandemic, decisions must be made quickly and result in concrete and effective measures for which each unit is responsible. These measures are key for educational institutions to pursue their activities in accordance with the three strategies established. This is a major issue.

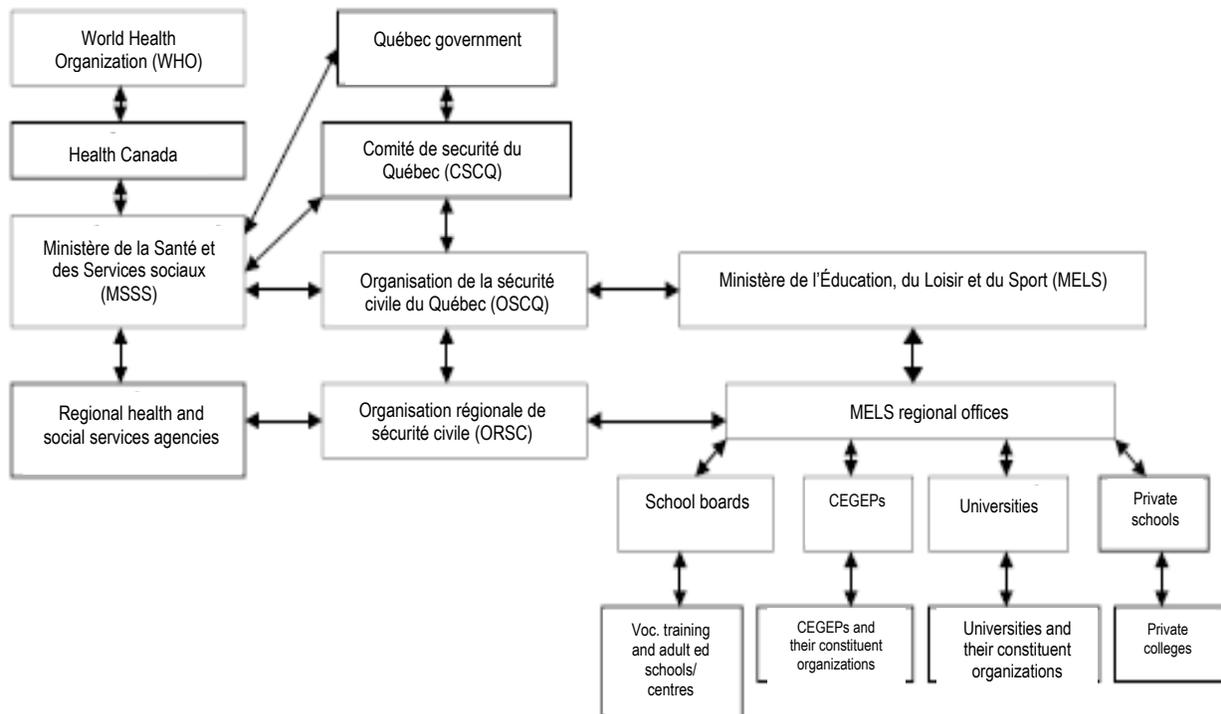
Each educational institution is responsible for implementing the measures specified in its response plans, according to the predetermined decision-making process.

MELS recommends that school boards adopt a centralized decision-making process. A decision made centrally would then be communicated to all levels, until even those service points farthest from the decision-making centre are reached. This process could also include the delegation of responsibilities within a chain of authority in order to ensure maximum effectiveness of decisions and measures during an influenza pandemic.

Should there be a high incidence of person-to-person transmission, with numerous serious cases, complications or deaths, educational institutions could exceptionally be temporarily closed. This decision would not be up to the educational institution, as is the case, for example, in heavy snowstorms. Each school organization and educational institution must notify MELS of any abnormal rate of absenteeism or other exceptional situation. Based on this information,

MELS, in conjunction with the public health authorities and the regional civil protection organizations (ORSC) concerned, will recommend the measures required, such as closing the educational institution. Given the social and economic impacts involved, such a decision would have to be made jointly.

- **The chain of coordination and communication in the education sector**



- **The governance committee**

MELS recommends that a governance committee be set up to coordinate the response plan. This committee could be made up of a civil protection responder at the educational institution or school board as well as representatives of educational services, human resources, material resources and communications.

The decisions of the governance committee would be binding and communicated according to the process set in place.

STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders in the influenza pandemic are the decision makers, employees and associations. All contribute to protecting the health of staff and students, maintaining services for them, and minimizing organizational impacts.

Decision makers are individuals with authority in these circumstances. They plan the measures that will be implemented in line with the education sector's three strategies. They are also employees.

Employees are individuals who work at educational institutions. They perform their regular duties, that is, those defined as essential in the response plan.

Associations are groups of people, for example, unions. They participate in implementing the response plan's measures according to their level of involvement.

Each well-prepared stakeholder will be in a position to offer the maximum services to staff and students at the educational institution and thus significantly participate in the success of the response plan.

COMMUNICATION: AN ESSENTIAL TOOL

Services Québec has developed a government communications management plan, the *Plan de communication du gouvernement du Québec en cas de pandémie d'influenza* (PCG-Qc). The PCG-Qc outlines the general strategy for communication during an influenza pandemic as provided for under the *National Civil Protection Plan's* "Communication" mission.

Each of the government departments and educational institutions are also required to prepare a sectorial communications plan aimed at the general public, their respective clienteles and staff.

- **Communication within the education sector**

MELS is responsible for ensuring communication pertaining to a pandemic with educational institutions and other school organizations, their staff and students. MELS must ensure that they receive all relevant information so that they can take whatever action is needed.

In a pandemic, MELS information bulletins pertaining to actions or measures to be taken in compliance with MSSS recommendations are sent directly to all Québec school organizations and educational institutions in order to reduce delays in the transmission of information. These information bulletins are also available on the MELS Web site.

MELS sends its information bulletins to the e-mail addresses given by the civil protection responders of each school organization and educational institution (in the section "Intervenant: Répondant en sécurité civile" of the *Système de gestion du dossier unique sur les organismes [GDUNO]*). Each school organization and educational institution is responsible for keeping the information in this system up to date. Moreover, each civil protection

responder must ensure that the e-mail box corresponding to this electronic address is accessible at all times to other personnel so that the information contained therein can be transmitted quickly to those people in the organization who are responsible in the event that the responder is not available.

- **Communication on a regional level**

The MELS regional offices, in conjunction with the ORSC, are responsible for disseminating information in the regions through their civil protection responders in each educational institution.

Regional information is thus transmitted to the various responders in the region, who will then communicate it to their educational institution or school board.

- **Communication in emergency situations**

Certain events that took place during the management of the breakout of Influenza A(H1N1) in the spring of 2009 have taught us that it is necessary for MELS to have complete contact information for the civil protection responder in each educational institution, so that this person can be contacted at any time if public health interventions are necessary.

It is therefore important that emergency contact information for the civil protection responder in each educational institution be entered in the Système de gestion du dossier unique sur les organismes (GDUNO), in the section "Intervenant: Responsable en sécurité civile," along with contact information for his or her substitute in the section "Intervenant: Substitut au responsable en sécurité civile." Each educational institution is responsible for keeping the information in this system up to date.

- **Communication within the school system**

Each school organization and teaching institution is responsible for communicating information to its schools, training centres or constituent organizations.

Each must prepare a communications plan aimed at swiftly transmitting pandemic information received by MELS to its staff and students or to parents of minor children. The Web sites of educational institutions can be a good means for reaching and informing those concerned. The resources required must be allocated to ensure the implementation of the various measures provided for in the communications plan of the school organization or educational institution.

- **Communication with parents**

In an emergency situation like an influenza pandemic, it is important that the parents of minor schoolchildren be informed of the situation at the school and of the measures that have been adopted to provide a safe environment for their children. This information will reassure parents and will thereby avoid exacerbating panic situations or reactions due to a lack of information on the situation in their children's school. Moreover, a proper understanding of the situation will make it easier for parents to collaborate in applying certain measures, such as keeping children with flu-like symptoms at home.

Elementary and secondary school organizations and educational institutions must make provision for a mechanism that will be used to swiftly inform parents in a pandemic situation and to indicate the means that will be used to send them information.

MONITORING: AN INVALUABLE TOOL

In an influenza pandemic, the levels of student and staff absenteeism serve as indicators of the spread of the disease, but also as reference points for deciding to close schools. A monitoring mechanism must be established in each educational institution. Each one should be able to indicate the number of staff members and students who are absent.

In a pandemic situation, each educational institution must be vigilant with regard to changes in the rates of absenteeism and inform MELS of any instances of absenteeism above 10 per cent connected with flu-like symptoms.

At the request of MELS, each educational institution or organization must transmit its data on absences. This can be done on a daily basis. The data for each institution must be transmitted to MELS before 11:00 a.m.

Each educational institution must therefore plan its mechanism for collecting data on staff and student absenteeism and provide for the personnel required to carry out this task, so that information can be transmitted to MELS within the prescribed time, should the situation warrant it.

Should a decision be made in conjunction with the public health authorities to close educational institutions in order to prevent the flu virus from spreading, each institution must ensure that it has the required number of teachers available for the date on which classes are slated to resume. It must, therefore, equip itself with a mechanism for communicating with teachers at home, as well as with the staff in charge of such communication.

CHAPTER 5

STRATEGY-BASED MEASURES

STRATEGY 1: PROTECT THE HEALTH OF STAFF AND STUDENTS

- **Reduced contact with infected individuals**

As indicated in health service advisories, educational institutions must apply measures that reduce the risk of contamination by staff and students with flu symptoms (see the document *What you need to know, what you need to do—Protecting yourself, protecting others* on the Québec government’s influenza pandemic Web site at <http://www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/news/news.shtml> under the heading “Useful Tools”).

When an influenza pandemic is in progress, each educational institution must ask all students and school staff who exhibit two flu-like symptoms (e.g. fever and cough with sore throat, extreme fatigue and muscle aches⁵) to remain at home until their symptoms have disappeared. However, should such symptoms persist beyond seven days, the affected students or staff members may resume their normal activities, providing their general state of health allows for it.

Elementary and secondary educational institutions must adopt means of communicating with parents to ask them to keep at home students who present flu-like symptoms, and to advise them that students who arrive at school exhibiting such symptoms will be sent back home.

Other educational institutions should ask students who present such symptoms to return home immediately so that they do not contaminate other students or the staff.

- **Identifying students with flu symptoms**

When a pandemic is in progress, some students and staff exhibiting flu-like symptoms will show up at school, despite the request that anyone showing such symptoms remain at home. These individuals must quickly be identified and asked to return home so that they do not contaminate their peers or colleagues.

Appendix 2 consists of a questionnaire to be used to identify flu symptoms. Any person exhibiting the symptoms described in this questionnaire must be asked to return home immediately.

5. See Appendix 2.

All educational institutions must provide this questionnaire (Appendix 2) to all their staff so that they can quickly identify students who present flu-like symptoms and ask them to return home to reduce the risk of contaminating others.

- **Quarantining infected students**

Elementary and secondary educational institutions must set aside areas for quarantining students with flu-like symptoms until they return home.

These areas must be able to accommodate several students while leaving a distance of two metres between them, and must be equipped with gym mats, sick bags, tissues, antiseptic gel, a closed garbage can and drinking water. It is also recommended that they be provided with anti-projection masks⁶ to cut down on the excretion of the virus into the immediate environment.

These quarantine environments will have to be cleaned frequently with the usual disinfectants. Gym mats should preferably be used for sleeping or resting since they are available in all educational institutions and can be cleaned easily.

Each educational institution must designate a person to be in charge of this quarantine area and to monitor the students who must go there. It is recommended that this person be provided with gloves and anti-projection masks, to be worn when coming into close contact with students exhibiting flu-like symptoms.

For additional information on flu symptoms, physical health or measures to be taken, the person in charge of the quarantine area can call Info-Santé at 811.

- **Sending infected students home**

Students exhibiting flu-like symptoms who have to take the school bus to return home must wear an anti-projection mask during the trip and, if possible, must sit alone.

- **Vaccination and distribution of antivirals**

Vaccination and, if applicable, the distribution of antivirals⁷ fall under the responsibility of the MSSS.

6. The public health department of the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux uses the term “anti-projection mask” to designate surgical or operating masks.

7. At this time, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux is not planning on distributing antivirals as a preventive measure. Text extracted from or based upon the document entitled

Each school organization and educational institution must, however, be equipped to organize or participate in, as the case may be, such measures on behalf of its staff or students.

Educational institutions may have to use large rooms, such as gymnasiums, for mass vaccination clinics, and should arrange to make such premises available to the MSSS should the situation warrant it.

- **General and personal hygiene measures**

Educational institutions must educate their staff and students as to the importance of hand washing and respiratory etiquette. They must encourage everyone to apply these hygiene measures at all times, as they are critical to preventing the spread of influenza.

Hand hygiene means thoroughly washing hands with hot water and soap or disinfecting hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 per cent alcohol.

Respiratory etiquette includes these simple actions to be performed at all times when a person coughs or sneezes in order to avoid transmission of infection:

- Always cover your mouth with a disposable tissue when coughing or sneezing, and thoroughly wash your hands afterward.
- If you do not have a disposable tissue, cough in the fold of your elbow or upper arm because these areas will not come into contact with other persons or objects.
- Always spit into a disposable tissue.
- Discard used tissues in a garbage bag in a closed wastebasket and keep it out of young children's reach. When full, the garbage bag should be tightly closed and put in the trash.
- Wash your hands.

Because of the way in which the virus is transmitted, staff and students do not need to wear personal protective equipment (facemasks). However, if persons are required to be within less than two metres of an infected person for a prolonged period, a mask should be worn and used as follows:

- A mask should be used only once and replaced if:
 - o it becomes damp or wet
 - o it makes breathing difficult
 - o it is damaged or visibly dirty

- A used mask must be placed in a garbage bag in a closed wastebasket or kept out of children's reach; the bag should be tightly closed and put in the trash.

- Hands should be thoroughly washed immediately after removing a mask.

The educational institution or organization must plan to have an adequate supply of facemasks on hand to meet responder requirements. An "anti-projection mask" is a surgical or operating mask, not a type N95 air purifying respirator (APR).

- **Building maintenance**

Each school organization and educational institution must have on hand disinfectant products bearing a DIN code,⁸ liquid hand soap and paper towels. Disinfectants are effective in eliminating the virus on surfaces but, in order to be effective, must be used as indicated (dilution, water temperature and amount of time in contact with surfaces) and stored, like any other cleaning product, in clearly identified containers.

Dispensers or individual bottles of antiseptic hand cleaners can be made available in places that lack running water. Such cleaners must contain at least 60 per cent alcohol. They must be used with caution and adult supervision in the case of elementary school students, since ingesting them may cause poisoning in young children.

During the response period, it is recommended that surfaces and objects with which many people frequently come into contact in common areas be cleaned daily with the usual cleaning products. Particular attention must be paid to certain parts of the common areas, such as stair or escalator railings, door handles, elevator buttons and all other surfaces that are frequently touched.

8. A Drug Identification Number (DIN) is a computer-generated eight-digit number assigned by Health Canada to a drug product prior to being marketed in Canada. It is located on the label of products that have been evaluated and authorized for sale in Canada.

In dining rooms and spaces reserved for personal hygiene (toilet areas), cleaning methods must comply with the minimum requirements set out in the *Regulation respecting occupational health and safety*.

- Dining rooms: clean-up after each meal and daily disinfection
- Toilets: clean-up and wipe-down before each shift or during the first half of each shift, and daily disinfection. Disinfection must be carried out with a bleach-based solution or an equivalent sanitary product.

The influenza virus is propagated by contact and by fine droplets projected when people cough or sneeze. Since the virus does not remain suspended in the air, there is no point in adopting additional measures concerning air circulation and filtration. Regular operation and normal upkeep of the heating, air conditioning and air circulation systems are maintained.

Cleaning and maintenance staff do not need protective gear beyond what is required by the products used (see the manufacturers' instructions). They must wear gloves, particularly for handling garbage cans containing tissues. It is also recommended that they wash their hands frequently. These measures should apply at all times, not only when faced with an influenza pandemic.

For more information, please see the *Guide—Mesures de prévention dans un contexte de pandémie d'influenza à l'intention des employeurs et travailleurs du Québec* (MSSS—CSST), particularly Appendix 3, at the following address: http://www.pandemiequebec.ca/pdf/07_235_07.pdf. This document is available only in French.

- **Social distancing**

During the period of the pandemic, social distancing must be promoted and the size of gatherings must be limited.

If person-to-person propagation of the virus becomes widespread and leads to many serious cases, complications or deaths, this situation could give rise to the implementation of strict social distancing measures. The following measures are presented as examples to facilitate planning and implementation, should the situation warrant it.

- In elementary and secondary school, stagger recess and meal times for the different grades in order to reduce the size of student gatherings.
- Ask people who use the dining areas in educational institutions to maintain a distance of one chair between them.

- Plan to keep carrying out physical education and sports activities,⁹ but participants must not present flu-like symptoms such as those described in Appendix 2. Any participant who does exhibit such symptoms should be excluded from physical education classes and sports activities. The number of spectators should also be limited in order to maintain a reasonable distance among them.
 - Ask the staff to avoid handshakes or embraces and to put off non-essential team meetings. Meetings that cannot be postponed should be held in a room large enough to allow for a reasonable distance among the participants.
- **Trips abroad**

Students or staff members who plan to travel abroad during a period of pandemic should, before leaving, consult the travel advisories issued by the Public Health Agency of Canada. A hyperlink to these advisories is provided on the Web site of Pandémie Québec at:

<http://www.pandemiequebec.ca/en/news/advice-travellers.shtml>.

STRATEGY 2: MAINTAIN SERVICES FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS

- **Inventory, evaluate and select the services, activities and facilities considered essential**

For planning purposes, each educational institution must mobilize administrators at all levels in inventorying, evaluating and selecting the services, activities and facilities required to maintain essential services offered to staff and students during the influenza pandemic.

- **Prioritize essential services**

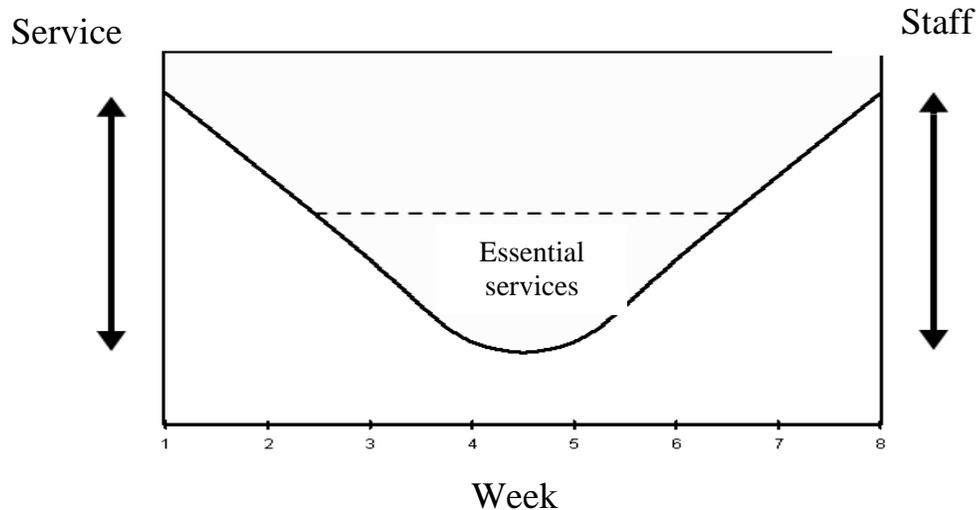
The services, activities and facilities must be classified in order of importance according to a scale of priorities, thus identifying the essential services that will be maintained during an influenza pandemic.

Essential services are those services, activities and facilities that cannot be interrupted, even for a short time, without having serious consequences on staff and students as well as on the operation of educational institutions.¹⁰

9. This recommendation also applies to activities that involve close contact among participants, such as dance classes.

10. This definition implicitly includes the concept of “essential goods” in section 60 of the *Civil Protection Act* (R.S.Q., c. S-2.3).

The following diagram illustrates the impact of influenza on staff and on services for students during a pandemic; the area below the dotted line indicates the level of essential services that will be maintained during a pandemic.



Educational institutions must provide the following essential services during a pandemic:

- management of human resources, financial resources (e.g. payroll) and material resources (e.g. the safety of premises)
- school daycare services, educational services and instructional services offered without interruption
- maintenance of communications and smooth operation of computer and telecommunications infrastructures

After a pandemic, educational institutions will set priorities for resuming regular services, activities, and so forth that were interrupted or affected by the pandemic.

- **Determine and plan workforce requirements**

In order to plan its workforce requirements for the response period, each educational institution must determine the number of employees required to continue providing its services and activities. To do so, it must know, foresee and identify the pools of labour it will be able to call upon. It must also draw up a plan for replacements in the event that a large number of teachers are absent.

- **Manage absenteeism and attendance in the workplace**

Relying on the participation and solidarity of all stakeholders (employees, decision makers and associations) during the influenza pandemic, educational institutions must plan measures to help them manage staff absenteeism that comply with local and provincial collective agreements and labour laws, since these will apply as usual. During the pandemic, managers must ask all employees exhibiting flu-like symptoms to remain at home, and in case of doubt, may require a note from a doctor to justify their absence.

Those in charge of managing workplace attendance should be concerned not only with offering staff and students the maximum services possible, but also with dealing with the psychosocial impacts of the pandemic on staff. The presence of individuals with flu symptoms in the workplace will also need to be managed.

With regard to occupational health and safety, the right of refusal or a preventive leave in conformity with the *Act respecting Occupational health and safety* are managed following the normal procedure. Depending on the evolution of the situation of the pandemic, the Commission de la santé et de la sécurité au travail (CSST) may issue specific notices concerning certain aspects of its regulations.

For all other questions concerning the employer's responsibilities and for staff questions, various documents are available in the "Workers and employers" section of the Québec government's influenza pandemic Web site at the following address:

<http://www.pandemiequebec.ca/en/effects/sante-securite-trav.shtml>

- **List the essential services responders**

For each essential service identified in their plans, educational institutions must prepare a list of designated responders and their replacements as well as their work and home contact information. This list must be updated at least twice a year in interpandemic periods, and even monthly or weekly during the pandemic. This list could also be used in the event of a crisis or disaster other than an influenza pandemic.

- **Train replacement staff**

Educational institutions must provide training for replacement staff in charge of dispensing the essential services that their response plan indicates will be maintained during the influenza pandemic.

STRATEGY 3: MINIMIZE THE ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

- **Quality of information**

Consistent, coordinated and quality information helps organize all stakeholders and achieve the service objectives for staff and students identified in the response plan.

- **Involvement of suppliers, subcontractors and partners**

Services are sometimes entrusted to subcontractors (e.g. janitorial and food services). To avoid a drop in the quality of essential services, educational institutions should require their subcontractors to prepare a plan for maintaining these services during the pandemic, especially those subcontractors involved in activities directly related to an essential service in the educational institution. This plan could also be used in the event of other major disasters.

- **Assistance to staff and students**

An influenza pandemic has repercussions on both the physical and psychological health of individuals (see the document entitled *Prevention of psychosocial impacts in the context of an influenza pandemic: for employers and workers in Québec* on the Québec government's influenza pandemic Web site at:

<http://www.pandemiequebec.ca/en/news/news.shtml>, under the heading "Workers and employers" and then under "Health in the workplace."

Staff and student assistance services in educational institutions should plan on receiving more requests for assistance and should adapt their services to the situation. This measure applies throughout the three periods of action, but especially during response and recovery. To facilitate work in the field, the MSSS has developed psychosocial response tools, which educational institutions must disseminate to their assistance services staff.

- **Compliance with legislation**

Educational institutions and school organizations, in conjunction with MELs, are responsible for establishing measures for making up missed school days, in compliance with the basic school regulations and training regulations, if applicable.

Administrative procedures will also continue to apply, for example, those ensuing from local and provincial collective agreements.

Employers whose employees are not covered by a collective agreement may consult the document entitled *Worried about the possibility of a flu pandemic? Reminder sheet outlining the applicable standards* on the Commission des normes du travail Web site at:

<http://www.cnt.gouv.qc.ca/en/documentation-centre/publications/our-publications/index.html>.

- **Specific costs associated with the pandemic**

MELS is monitoring specific costs associated with the pandemic. Each educational institution and school organization should be able to tabulate its costs and to transmit the resulting data to MELS upon request. The appropriate invoices or supporting documents attesting to pandemic-related costs must be kept in case MELS asks to see them.

CHAPTER 6

CONTRIBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TO CIVIL PROTECTION DURING OTHER DISASTERS

The influenza pandemic response plan for maintaining essential services prepared by educational institutions is similar to response plans for other major disasters (e.g. earthquakes, floods, ice storms) that could occur in Québec.

CIVIL PROTECTION IN QUÉBEC

In the event of an emergency or disaster, citizens are first and foremost responsible for ensuring their own safety and that of their loved ones as well as for safeguarding their personal belongings.

Next comes the first level of public responsibility: the municipality, which when overwhelmed can call upon regional authorities, who, in turn, can have recourse to provincial government resources.

The Québec government therefore regularly updates the general framework for managing all types of risks entitled the *National Civil Protection Plan* (NCP). This plan contains the measures that government departments and agencies will implement in order to support municipalities when their resources can no longer provide citizens with assistance during a major disaster.

MELS, a member of the Organisation de la sécurité civile du Québec (OSCQ), cooperates in government management of the effects of disasters on individuals and property by participating in the NCP.

MISSIONS ESTABLISHED IN THE *NATIONAL CIVIL PROTECTION PLAN*

The Québec government has organized its civil protection actions on the basis of 15 needs likely to arise in the event of a disaster. The needs laid out in the NCP are referred to as “missions.” Each mission falls under the direction of a government department or agency, which has activities similar to those set forth in the mission, or which has the expertise necessary to successfully accomplish the task at hand.¹¹

11. Ministère de la Sécurité publique, Québec's *National Civil Protection Plan*, [http://www.msp.gouv.qc.ca/secivile/secivile_en.asp?txtSection=initier&txtCategorie=pnsc].

SUPPORT OF NCPP MISSIONS BY MELS AND THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY

During major disasters other than a pandemic, educational institutions could be called upon as reinforcements to support the following civil protection missions:

- Housing: use of educational institutions as emergency shelters
- Support services for disaster victims:
 - use of educational institutions as service centres for disaster victims
 - resumption of educational services for students in the event of a lengthy evacuation
- Transportation: cooperation of school bus companies to transport disaster victims

SUPPORT OF NCPP MISSIONS BY THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY

Each school board is responsible for its educational institutions during civil protection measures.

When educational institutions are used to support a civil protection mission, school boards must provide the following essential services:

- ensure the safety of buildings
- ensure access to buildings
- ensure the cleaning of premises

Each school board is responsible for ascertaining whether its buildings have been identified in the municipality's civil protection plan for possible use during a disaster.

School boards must also notify the administrators of their educational institutions regarding the civil protection activities that they may be called upon to participate in.

PLANNING THE SUPPORT OF NCPP MISSIONS BY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Support of civil protection missions must be planned and integrated into the educational institution's response plan. The plan must also identify the essential services that will be maintained during the influenza pandemic.

This involves:

- a plan for maintaining the following essential services in support of certain missions:
 - ensure the safety of buildings
 - ensure access to buildings
 - ensure the cleaning of premises
- the contact information of a responder and his or her replacement for each essential service as well as the contact information for school bus companies
- the list of buildings used in support of the "Housing" and "Support services for disaster victims" missions

Municipalities often use schools as shelters and service centres in the first hours of a disaster. Agreements should therefore be concluded for the use of school facilities. The emergency measures that both municipalities and educational institutions will apply must therefore be planned.

However, during the pandemic, and so as not to interfere with educational services, the MSSS does not intend to use educational institutions as nontraditional health care sites. Nevertheless, the use of large rooms such as gymnasiums in educational institutions may be required for mass vaccinations. Consequently, educational institutions must prepare to place these spaces at the disposal of the MSSS should the situation warrant it.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on preparing educational institutions for the influenza pandemic, please contact your MELS regional office.

Additional information on the influenza pandemic is available on the Québec government's influenza pandemic Web site at:
<http://www.pandemiequebec.ca/en/news/news.shtml>.

Additional information on the organization of civil protection in Québec is available on the Web site of the Ministère de la Sécurité publique at:
http://www.msp.gouv.qc.ca/secivile/index_en.asp.

Appendix 1

PLANNING MEASURES TO BE TAKEN BY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS DURING THE INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

Prevention and preparedness

A		Designate, in the MELS GDUNO system, a civil protection responder as well as a replacement in each school board.	
B		Set up a governance committee in the event of an influenza pandemic.	
C		Develop a plan for maintaining essential services during a pandemic that:	
C	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifies the essential services required for the board to run smoothly 	
C	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishes a list of essential services responders and their replacements 	
C	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides training for staff replacing personnel involved in dispensing essential services 	
C	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides for a plan for replacements in the event that a large number of teachers are absent 	
C	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • requests union cooperation in managing workplace absenteeism and attendance 	
C	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adapts staff and student assistance services 	
C	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implements a monitoring system to track absences in educational institutions 	
C	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organizes how support of NCPP civil protection missions as well as essential services, as applicable, will be planned 	
D		Develop agreements with different suppliers in order to maintain services (e.g. janitorial or food services).	
E		Develop a communications plan for educational institutions, staff, students and parents that:	
E	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educates staff, students and parents about the prevention methods to adopt in educational institutions 	
E	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disseminates information on the influenza pandemic to staff, students and parents 	
F		Prepare a temporary quarantine room for infected students and designate someone to be responsible for this space and make students comfortable in it.	
G		Plan building maintenance and stock the necessary products.	
H		Plan various possible social distancing measures.	

Response period

A	Apply the response strategy determined by the Organisation de la sécurité civile du Québec (OSCQ) or the Organisation régionale de sécurité civile (ORSC), with regard to the reduction of contacts with infected persons and social distancing measures.	
B	Implement the influenza pandemic response plan, in particular to ensure the continuity of school daycare services, as well as educational and instructional services.	
C	Implement communications plans intended for educational institutions, staff and students (or for parents in the case of minor children).	
D	Hold frequent meetings of the school board's governance committee.	
E	Implement a monitoring system to track absences (e.g. number of absent students and staff members) in each educational institution and forward the information to MELS.	
F	Adjust measures related to building maintenance.	

Recovery period

A	Ensure that school boards support their educational institutions so that educational and instructional services can resume normally.	
B	Establish priorities for resuming services, activities, and so forth that were interrupted or affected by the pandemic.	
C	Establish conditions for making up school days so as to comply with the basic school regulations or training regulations, if applicable.	
D	Adapt assistance services for staff and students in educational institutions by taking into account the repercussions of the influenza pandemic.	

Appendix 2

TOOL FOR IDENTIFYING FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS

This tool will help those who work in teaching institutions to recognize flu-like symptoms among students and staff.

Tool for assessing flu-like symptoms (FLS)

Check the following:

___ 1. Sudden onset of fever accompanied by cough

AND

___ 2. One or more of the following symptoms:

___ Sore throat

___ Aches throughout the body (“it hurts everywhere”)

___ Stiffness

___ Extreme fatigue

___ Other symptoms associated with the pandemic strain (e.g. diarrhea)

Anyone presenting two symptoms from this list should immediately be asked to return home to avoid contaminating peers or colleagues. If an elementary or secondary school student exhibits two of these symptoms, he or she must be temporarily quarantined in the area set aside for this purpose, while waiting to go home.

For more information concerning flu-like symptoms, the physical health of individuals or measures to be taken, contact Info-Santé at 811.



www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca

[**www.mels.gouv.qc.ca**](http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca)