

## HTEA stops pesticide fogging for flu prevention



**AFL-CIO:**  
[www.aflcio.org/issues/safety/pandemic\\_influenza.cfm](http://www.aflcio.org/issues/safety/pandemic_influenza.cfm)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):**  
[www.flu.gov/plan/school/index.html](http://www.flu.gov/plan/school/index.html)

**N.J. Department of Health and Senior Services:**  
[www.state.nj.us/health/flu/h1n1.shtml](http://www.state.nj.us/health/flu/h1n1.shtml)

**U.S. Department of Education:**  
[www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/pandemic/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/pandemic/index.html)

**N.J. Department of Education:**  
[www.state.nj.us/education/schools/security/h1n1](http://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/security/h1n1)

**Alert !!!**

If a local association learns that its district or board of education is considering the purchase of a pesticide disinfectant fogging device, its leadership should contact its UniServ office immediately. NJEA wants to prevent unnecessary exposure of members and students to toxic pesticide disinfectants.

Fogging is not only dangerous but also unnecessary, since CDC recommendations for flu prevention emphasize hand-washing, routine cleaning, early treatment, as well as keeping sick, high-risk staff and students at home. Schools are also urged to clean surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact.

Additional disinfection is not recommended because flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Since the flu virus only lives for two to eight hours outside the body, only cleaning that takes place while school is actually in session makes a difference. The virus dies on its own overnight without disinfection.

### Flu prevention steps school districts should be taking

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued these guidelines for public schools, kindergarten through grade 12, to use in stopping the spread of flu during the 2009-10 school year.

**Stay home when sick:** Those with flu-like illness should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever. They should stay home even if they are using antiviral drugs.

**Separate ill students and staff:** Students and staff who appear to have flu-like illness should be sent to a room separate from others until they can be sent home. Those who care for ill students and staff should wear protective gear, such as N95 respirators.

**Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette:** Wash hands frequently with soap and water when possible, and cover noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, or use a shirt sleeve or elbow if no tissue is available.

**Routine cleaning:** While school is in session, perform extra cleaning of commonly touched surfaces like doorknobs, desks, computer keyboards and mice.

**Early treatment of high-risk students and staff:** People at high risk for complications who become ill with influenza-like illness should call their doctors immediately. Early treatment with antiviral medications is important for those who are pregnant, have asthma, diabetes, compromised immune systems, or neuromuscular diseases.

**Consideration of selective school dismissal:** Although there are not many schools where all or most students are at high risk (for example, schools for medically fragile children or for pregnant students) a community might decide to dismiss such a school to better protect these high-risk students.

The Howell Township Education Association (HTEA) prevented Howell Township school district in Monmouth County from fogging classrooms and school buses with quaternary ammonium (quat) disinfectant pesticides to kill the H1N1 ("swine flu") virus, a victory for HTEA members, other staff, and students. The fogging would have put 7,000 K-8 students and staff in 12 elementary and middle schools at unnecessary risk of quat-triggered irritation, sensitization, and asthma attacks.

In August, the district was the first in the nation to purchase three Zimek Micro Mist Room and Vehicle Decontamination Systems at a cost of \$132,000. The devices consist of an aerosol generator that disperses anti-microbial pesticide particles. A HEPA filtering unit removes airborne residue from the application area but leaves behind disinfectant residues that adhere to all exposed surfaces. Their use would have violated the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA).

HTEA members attended school board meetings where the equipment purchase was debated and approved. HTEA leadership requested technical assistance from UniServ field rep Marc Abramson and Thomas Hardy, the UniServ health and safety contact.

**Team approach successful**

At Hardy's request, N.J. Work Environment Council (WEC) industrial hygienists reviewed the label and Materials Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for the pesticide and consulted with pesticide experts at the N.J. Environmental Federation (NJEF). WEC and NJEF concluded that the proposed fogging was dangerous and unnecessary.

HTEA President Bill O'Brien then called a meeting of members representing different jobs in the school with WEC Industrial Hygienist Adrienne Markowitz. She explained the hazards of fogging quats and discussed strategies to stop it.

At a meeting with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region II, Zimek was told to stop its illegal use of quats, according to Eileen Levine, an HTEA member and concerned parent who attended the meeting with Markowitz. The EPA referred the case for enforcement to EPA Region IV, which covers Zimek Technologies' home office in Tampa, Fla.

"Selling these machines is a lucrative business," said Markowitz. "Zimek may approach other school districts to promote fogging with quats or other pesticides."

Markowitz noted that WEC has written to the EPA expressing such concerns. In addition, WEC has filed a complaint with the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) concerning safety claims by Safe Air, Zimek's distributor in New Jersey.

"Thanks to HTEA and allies such as WEC and NJEF, the school district has returned the devices and been refunded its money. Students, teachers, and support staff are safer," Markowitz concluded.

**For more information**  
**New Jersey H1N1 Hotline:**  
 866-321-9571, 7 days, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**NEA:**  
[neahin.org/h1n1](http://neahin.org/h1n1)