

Executive Summary of Findings Related to the Experience of Parents During School Closures Due to H1N1

Introduction

This poll examined the experiences of parents whose child/ren's daycare or school did close or might have closed due to H1N1. It included three populations: parents nationally; parents in areas where there were a higher number of school closures whose child/ren's schools or daycares did not close; and those in high closure areas whose schools/daycares did close. Results are presented here in two parts:

- The first part of this report summarizes key findings regarding the experience of parents in high-closure areas who experienced a school or daycare closure. Topics include: the nature of these school closures, concern among parents about H1N1, their beliefs and views about the school closure decision, their information resources during the school closures, parents' information resources generally about H1N1 prevention, and the problems parents encountered.
- The second part describes the experience of parents in high closure areas. Results shed light on flu prevention behaviors adopted in schools and among children and parents' experiences caring for a child sick with H1N1 during the outbreak. Where relevant, views of parents in high closure areas who experienced a school/daycare closure are compared to those of parents in high closure areas who did *not* experience a school/daycare closure and those at the national level (who, in the vast majority of cases, did not experience a school/daycare closure).

Part I: The Experiences of Parents in High Closure Areas whose Child/ren's Schools or Daycares Closed Due to H1N1

School Closures

Twenty-six percent of parents in high closure areas who experienced a school/daycare closure (26%) reported experiencing a school closure since the start of the school year in August/September 2009, compared to 2% nationally. Most of these closures were for a short amount of time. More than half of these parents (58%) reported that the school was closed for three school days or less, while less than 10% reported a closing of more than 5 school days. Nearly three-quarters of such parents (74%) reported that after-school activities, including sports, performances, or field trips, were cancelled as part of the closure.

Concern about H1N1

More than half (54%) of parents in high closure areas who experienced a school/daycare closure said they were either "very" (22%) or "somewhat concerned" (32%) that their child/ren may get sick from H1N1 during the next 12 months. The same percentage (54%) reported being either "very" or "somewhat concerned" their child/ren may get sick from H1N1 at their school or daycare, specifically. Somewhat smaller proportions of these parents reported being concerned about their child/ren getting sick from H1N1 in other locations, such as public places like malls or movie theatres (40%) or while playing with friends outside of school or daycare (38%).

Views on the School Closure Decision

The vast majority (90%) of parents in high closure areas whose child/ren's schools/daycares closed agreed with the decision to close the school/daycare, with 71% agreeing strongly and 19% agreeing somewhat. Conversely, most (83%) felt that there was not a time that their child/ren's school/daycare should have closed due to H1N1 but did not.

Most parents whose child/ren's school/daycare closed believed that at least one of three factors was a major reason the institution had closed: To keep children apart and reduce the chance they would infect each other (81%); because the school felt it was important to clean the building and surfaces that children touch in order to reduce the spread of the illness (73%); or because the school or daycare could not operate effectively when a lot of students are absent (58%).

Roughly a third of these parents stated that a major reason for the school/daycare closure was because the school or daycare could not operate effectively when a lot of teachers are absent (36%) or because the school or daycare would lose funds if they have high levels of student absenteeism (35%). Most of these parents (85%) said that closing the school/daycare was effective in reducing the number of cases of H1N1 among the children who attend that school or daycare; nearly half (48%) said it was very effective and 38% said it was somewhat effective.

Information about School Closures

Most commonly, parents in high closure areas who experienced a school/daycare closure received most of their information about the closure from one of three sources: the individual school's/daycare's website, newsletter, or email (26%), the school system's website or newsletter (20%), or the local news (24%). The vast majority of parents who experienced a school/daycare closure (91%) were satisfied with the information they received about the closure, including nearly 70% who were very satisfied and 20% who were somewhat satisfied.

Problems Encountered During School Closures

Most parents who experienced a school/daycare closure (75%) said that having the institution closed was not a problem for their family. Only 3% said it was a major problem, while 20% said it was a minor problem. Four percent of parents who experienced a school/daycare closure said they had a problem arranging care for their children, while the remaining 96% did not. In addition, 42% said they experienced any issue among a specific list of possibilities, but only 7% suggested any of these issues were major problems for their families. The issues most commonly experienced were that a parent had to miss work (20%) or a child missed free or reduced cost school lunches (19%). Less than one in seven of these parents reported that their family incurred financial costs beyond typical days (11%); lost pay or income (10%); missed an appointment with potential financial impact (7%); or missed another kind of important appointment or event (7%). Only a very few of these parents felt that someone in their family was at risk of losing their job because of this closure (2%) or noted that their child missed health services usually provided by the school (1%). Three percent or less of parents in high closure areas who experienced a school/daycare closure said that any of these issues individually was a major problem for their families.

Re-Congregation During School Closures

The majority of parents in high closure areas who experienced a school/daycare closure reported that their child/ren participated in at least one activity involving people outside the household

during the closure. Fifty-six percent of these parents reported that their child/ren participated in at least one of a specific list of such activities; less than a third reported that they participated in any given activity. Most commonly, they said that children spent time with their friends at one another's homes (30%) or went grocery shopping (30%). Nearly a quarter (23%) said their child/ren went to fast food restaurants. Roughly one in seven said they attended public events like movies, sporting events or concerts (17%) or went to large shopping areas or malls (15%). Only a small percentage (6%) said their child/ren attended social events like parties or dances.

Parents' Resources for Information about H1N1 Prevention

Parents in high closure regions who experienced a school closure most often reported turning to their child's pediatrician (60%), their personal doctor (53%), and friends or family employed in the field of health care (46%) for information about prevention their child/ren from getting H1N1 since the start of the school year. When asked which source was most useful to them for such information, these parents most often said their child's pediatrician (32%) and, to a lesser extent, their personal doctor (19%).

Part II: The Experiences of Parents in High Closure Areas

Flu Prevention Behaviors in School and among Children

Parents in high closure regions (including those who had and had not experienced closure) reported that their child/ren had adopted some flu prevention behaviors in the wake of the H1N1 outbreak. Most commonly, parents in high-closure areas said their child/ren were washing hands or using sanitizer more frequently (89%). A majority of parents in high closure regions said their child/ren were adopting behaviors like covering their sneezes or coughs with a Kleenex or their elbow (66% and 64% respectively) or taking steps to avoid people with flu-like symptoms (62%). Fewer parents in high closure regions reported that child/ren are restricting their movement or avoiding places in order to control their exposure to H1N1. No more than a quarter of parents in high closure regions said their child/ren were going less often to or avoided places where large numbers of people are gathered (e.g., movies), large shopping areas or malls, family events or places of worship (25%, 25%, 16%, and 12% respectively).

Caring for a Child Sick with H1N1

Nineteen percent of parents in high-closure regions reported that their child/ren have been sick with what they believe is H1N1, compared to 17% nationally. Within these regions, more parents of children in schools that closed reported that their children have been sick with H1N1 as compared to parents whose child/ren's schools have not closed (30% vs. 15%).

Eight percent of parents in high-closure regions reported that they were unable to get medical care from a doctor or nurse for their children who were sick with what they believed was H1N1. This is statistically significantly more than the 2% of parents who report this same problem at the national level. Looking within the high-closure regions, parents of children in schools that closed and parents of children in schools that did not close were statistically equally likely to report that they were unable to get medical care for their sick child/ren (9% vs. 8%).

Forty percent of parents tried and succeeded in getting antiviral medications for their child/ren who were sick with what they believe was H1N1, which is statistically equivalent to the 44% of

parents at the national level who tried and succeeded. Fourteen percent of parents in high-closure regions reported that they tried but were unable to get antiviral medications for their sick children. This is statistically significantly more than the 6% of parents who report this same problem at the national level. Forty-six percent of parents in high-closure regions, and 49% of parents nationally did not try to get antiviral medication for their sick children. Looking within the high-closure regions, parents of children in schools/daycares that closed and parents of children in schools/daycares that did not close were statistically equally likely to report that they tried but were unable to get antiviral medications for their sick children (16% vs. 13%).