

League Position Statement Regarding Tournaments and H1N1 Flu Outbreaks

Subsection and section competition is already underway in several fall athletic activities. The first state tournaments — girls' tennis and girls' and boys' soccer — begin next week. Although unlikely, but entirely possible, outbreaks of the serious novel H1N1 flu virus could impact some teams or individuals involved in these tournaments.

What would happen if a team or individual is unable to compete due to the novel H1N1 flu virus?

A number of factors must be considered. Paramount is the health risk to participants involved in competition who are not ill. Equally important is the ability to advance teams and individuals in the various levels of tournaments, particularly as that relates to scheduling and venue availability.

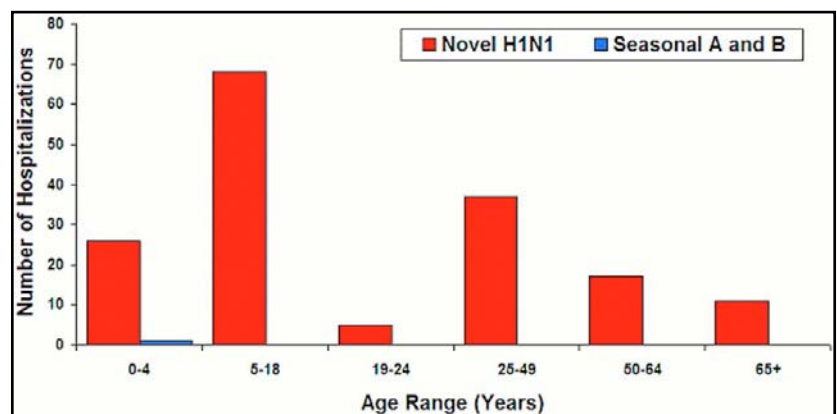
Health Risks

“Because of the amount of time, close proximity, and sharing of personal items that often occurs in sports, there may be increased risk of influenza spread in sports teams,” wrote Dr. Ruth Lynfield, state epidemiologist for the Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention, and Control Division of the Minnesota Department of Health in an early September letter to athletic directors and coaches. Also, most of the people who have had novel H1N1 influenza in Minnesota have been school-aged children.”

Because influenza primarily spreads when a person with the flu coughs or sneezes, both the Minnesota Department of Health and Minnesota Department of Education provided the following recommendations:

- 1. Athletes should not participate in activities if they have symptoms of influenza.** That means a fever of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or greater, with cough and/or a sore throat. Other symptoms of the flu include runny nose, headache, body aches, vomiting and diarrhea (in addition to fever and cough or sore throat). If you identify an athlete who has flu symptoms, immediately exclude them from participation in practice or games, and follow your usual procedures for sending them home.
- 2. Sick athletes should stay home and not participate in activities** for at least 24 hours *after* their fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing drugs like Tylenol or Motrin. Usually that means staying home for 5 to 7 days. Athletes staying home with flu symptoms should avoid contact with others except to get medical care. Aspirin or aspirin-containing products should not be used when a child has influenza symptoms.
- 3. Additional important points** — • The exclusion period is the same even if someone is on antiviral drugs such as Tamiflu (oseltamivir) or have had an influenza test that is negative, these tests are not always accurate. • Even after they can participate in athletics, athletes will be able to spread influenza, although less easily than when they had fever. To avoid spreading the virus, it is very important that they clean their hands frequently, cover coughs and sneezes with a sleeve or tissue, and not share personal items (e.g., water bottles).

Since the student-athletes involved in League activities fall into the age category most at risk, it is imperative that school administrators follow these guidelines to minimize greater spread of the virus. Thus, some difficult and agonizing decisions may be required. (The chart at right represents state cases as of Week 40, two weeks ago. Source – Minnesota Department of Health).



Scheduling and Venue Availability

Scheduling and venue availability are, in most cases, not exclusive of each other. In other words, it may be impossible to reschedule tournament competition due to the availability of tournament venues. A rented facility such as the Xcel Energy Center, the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome or University of Minnesota Aquatic Center may not be available for state events at any other later time than already scheduled.

There may be more opportunities for flexible scheduling of subsection or section competition because school or community facilities are often used. However, the requirement of advancement from one tournament level to the next and, in some cases, the same constraints of rented venue availability may not allow scheduling flexibility.

Ultimately, state tournament or meet qualifiers must be determined by specific dates in order to conduct the events according to the availability of all venues and tournament personnel.

Summary of Board of Directors Executive Committee Directives for Tournament Advancement

- Administrative region committees should exercise as much flexibility in scheduling as possible to determine state qualifiers and still meet the predetermined deadlines to do so. In all circumstances, the health ramifications of potentially spreading the novel H1N1 flu virus must be considered before teams or individuals are allowed to compete. Region secretaries must consult with pertinent school administrative personnel, League tournament directors and appropriate local health authorities during the decision-making process.
- Individual competitors (e.g. singles or doubles tennis players, swimmers or divers, cross country runners not affiliated with a competing team) will forfeit the opportunity to advance if unable to compete at any level of competition.
- Teams must forfeit a contest if they are unable to compete at any level of competition. However, forfeits are not required if a sufficient number of healthy athletes will allow a team to continue competition without the use of those athletes that are ill.
- Substitutes will only be permitted as identified in the Athletics Rules and Policies Manual, General Section, Substitution in League Tournaments.
- No individual or team will advance in tournament competition if a forfeit occurs. Administrative region committees and state tournament administrators will insert a bye for the next scheduled competitor instead of advancing any alternative individual or team.

“The League Board of Directors is very sensitive to the impact this policy may have on student-athletes and their communities,” explained Executive Director David Stead. “Forfeiting due to illness is not the desired outcome of any competition at any level. However, the reality is that the novel H1N1 flu is a serious illness that is spread rather easily. Plus, the constraints of time and venue availability require that this difficult, yet necessary, directive must be enforced.

“It is hoped that the League will never have to implement these restrictions. But, the Board always attempts to take proactive action whenever possible. Our member schools and the general public need to know the answer to ‘What if...?’”