

ACM LEADERSHIP CALL

H1N1 Flu Preparedness

Tuesday, September 15, 2009, 1:00 p.m. EDT

Moderators:

- Julia Bland, Executive Director, Louisiana Children's Museum (New Orleans)
- Marilee Jennings, Executive Director, Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose (CA)

Guest Speaker: Mamie Bittner, Deputy Director of Policy, Planning, Research & Communications, Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)

I. Introduction and Basic Facts about the H1N1 Virus, Marilee Jennings

The H1N1 virus is poised to make this a particularly difficult flu season. H1N1 is distinct from seasonal flu is expected to be dominant flu strain during this year's flu season. Like seasonal flu, illness in people with H1N1 can vary from mild to severe. Yet it is likely to infect more people than a typical seasonal flu because it is a new strain against which few people have immunity. It also spreads easily and seems to be affecting younger people disproportionately. ACM has posted resources on its Web site relating to the flu season (<http://www.childrensmuseums.org/programs/h1n1resources.htm>), including the Flu.gov Web site that has details on H1N1.

II. IMLS Perspective & Cultural Community's Role in Preparing for and Responding to H1N1, Mamie Bittner

Bittner explained that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is interested in using every way possible to get out accurate information about H1N1 to the public. The potential for misinformation is high, and so the CDC wants to make sure that communications tools are being used to keep everyone on message in spreading the word about the flu. Information about the virus and prevention changes weekly, such as how many H1N1 flu shots will provide sufficient immunity.

- ACM advises that museums should not give a specific recommendation to parents about whether their children need one or two H1N1 shots, but instead should direct parents to consult their pediatrician or point to other health information resources.

Bittner mentioned that there is no expert at IMLS on H1N1, yet IMLS recognizes that museums are in a prime position to share information.

Bittner suggested that museums stay in contact with their school districts to see how museums might help provide continuous learning if school attendance might be interrupted because of the flu. She added that with the many management and marketing concerns that museums have around this issue, IMLS wanted to be part of the ACM conference call to see what concerns and ideas are out there.

III. What is Your Institution Doing to Prepare? Open Discussion facilitated by Marilee Jennings and Julia Bland

Marilee Jennings encouraged all museums to be informed and know what resources are available, to be relevant, to be thoughtful of employees and guests, and to be proactive in keeping as informed and as prepared as possible.

A. Operational Procedures

I. Messaging to visitors and the media that museum is a clean and safe place to play

Marilee Jennings said that while museums are not able to guarantee a completely virus-free environment, museums should do their best to encourage healthy habits and maintain cleanliness. She asked children's museums' staff to share their strategies for providing a clean and safe environment and messaging this to the media and visitors.

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Leslie Bushara of the Children's Museum of Manhattan (NY) said that some parents have been afraid to visit public spaces, and that some have even been warned by their physicians to stay away. In response, the museum has added additional cleaning staff who clean the museum during operating hours and installed Purell stations around the museums with accompanying messaging. There is also a container for placing items that have been in children's mouths to be sanitized. The museum also has asked floor staff to be more engaged in promoting clean-up practices and to encourage parents to support healthy habits, such as singing "Happy Birthday" with their children to encourage hand washing for the appropriate length of time.

Jennifer Caleshu reported that Bay Area Discovery Museum (Sausalito, CA) added a flu information page to its Web site (http://www.badm.org/clean_and_safe/). Museum staff wrote a hand washing song, posted it to the Web site and asked parents to video their kids singing the song and submit it to the museum.

Lesly Attarian at Please Touch Museum (Philadelphia, PA) said that while the museum does not broadcast messages about flu precautions on its Web site, the entire staff is aware of the museum's cleaning procedures and are prepared to field inquiries from the media and parents regarding these. The staff's approach has been to not to draw attention to the flu issue but to have answers ready if people inquire about precautionary measures. Attarian noted that there are Purell stations throughout the museum.

Kim Stull from DuPage Children's Museum (Naperville, IL) reported that her museum also is holding back from connecting in people's minds that museum might be a dirty place. She asked for suggestions of how museums should respond if a child or adult comes into the museum with obvious symptoms – how can the museum staff address such visitors without offending them?

- Marilee Jennings shared that during the first wave of H1N1 outbreak in the spring, the Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose had an incident of discrimination against Latino visitors who coughed or sneezed (other visitors feared the Latino visitors were infected with the flu). The museum staff stood up for Latino visitors and did not ask any family to leave. The best thing to do is approach the parent and ask if there's anything that staff can do to help the (coughing/sneezing) child.
- Mandy Jo Euresti of Children's Museum of Brownsville (TX) said that during the spring H1N1 outbreak, her museum also did not want the liability of asking a family to leave. Instead, staff provided tissues and asked families to wash hands before entering the museum.
- Leslie Bushara said that Children's Museum of Manhattan agrees that it is not the museum's role to ask a family to leave, especially because museum staff are not experts at diagnosing illnesses. The most staff can do is ask if they can provide a drink of water or tissues. They wouldn't want to be in position of judging a children's condition or creating a wave of fear.

Lisa Atallah from WOW! Children's Museum (Lafayette, CO) suggested presenting flu prevention information in a positive light, describing what museum staff is doing to make the museum a healthy place for visitors. WOW! Children's Museum already has fielded questions from parents regarding cleaning practices, and they are now putting together a handout on the topic to parents.

Marci Donaho at The Jasmine Moran Children's Museum (Seminole, OK) said that her museum has encountered problems with adults, particularly teachers and school group chaperones, who leave sick children to sit out unattended while the rest of the group continues the visit. She asked how far the museum can go besides calling a school principal to let them know that all children must have supervision.

- Mandy Jo Euresti responded that Children's Museum of Brownsville uses its PA system to announce that all children must be supervised by an adult. They also encourage teacher involvement as part of a workshop, which helps increase the supervision. Also, each person in a large school group wears a color shirt, and students must stay in a particular zone matched to the color.

As for media coverage of her museum's prevention strategies, Mandy Jo Euresti credited the Children's Museum of Brownsville's positive relationship with the local newspaper for helping to communicate to local families that the

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museum was a clean and safe place to play. The museum issued a press release during the May outbreak to educate the public about the museum's cleaning practices. The newspaper took pictures at the museum during a cleaning, and these images appeared on the front page of the paper with story about extra cleaning practices that the museum had implemented to keep families safe.

Sheridan Turner said that at Kohl Children's Museum of Greater Chicago (Glenview, IL), they seek to be proactive rather than reactive, keeping all staff informed of cleaning procedures and protocol should a visitor ask. There is also signage at the registration desk.

Mandy Jo Euresti said that the Children's Museum of Brownsville wipes down water fountains periodically throughout the day and that there are signs above the water fountains with reminders to kids not to place their mouth on the water fountain.

Kathie Williams said that EdVenture Children's Museum (Columbia, SC) is taking its outreach programs about hand washing to local schools to get the message out about its effectiveness to stop the spread of flu.

2. Providing meaningful H1N1 information and resources to members, staff and volunteers

Jennifer Caleshu said that the Bay Area Discovery Museum's flu Web page has links to access H1N1 information.

Kim Stull said that at DuPage Children's Museum, there was a presentation made to staff about the H1N1 virus that emphasized the importance of staying home if one was feeling ill and where to find CDC information.

Sheridan Turner said that Kohl Children's Museum is suggesting to staff and visitors that they follow the CDC's guidelines of staying at home for 24 hours without a fever before engaging in public settings.

B. Museum Policies for Prevention

I. Museum's cleaning protocol

Lisa Atallah said that WOW! Children's Museum is looking into installing an HVAC filter in the museum and asked if anyone else had done this.

- Mike Nellis of Austin Children's Museum (TX) said his museum has an air filtration system, and they have been letting people know about it.
- Mandy Jo Euresti said that the Children's Museum of Brownsville had its air conditioner company change the museum's air filters and vacuumed air ducts following the H1N1 outbreak in May. The museum publicized that this extra cleaning protocol.
- Sheridan Turner said that Kohl Children's Museum's Silver LEED building has a system that circulates fresh air throughout the museum.

Patricia Adams said that at Curious Kids' Museum (St. Joseph, MI), they usher school visitors to the bathroom to wash their hands when entering the museum. When leaving the museum, school children receive a sticker to put on their shirts and get a squirt of Purell into their hands.

Joel Cencius said that Betty Brinn Children's Museum (Milwaukee, WI) has added to the staff's cleaning routines to wipe down areas that are frequently touched such as rails, door knobs, restroom toilet handles and telephones in addition to exhibit surfaces multiple times a day.

The following cleaning products were mentioned:

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- Jennifer Caleshu said Bay Area Discovery Museum uses a local vendor for its organic alcohol-based product for cleaning hands.
- Joel Cencius said that Betty Brinn Children's Museum uses a product called Saniguard, an aerosol spray that dries quickly on contact.
- Mandy Jo Euresti said that Children's Museum of Brownsville cleans with multiple disinfectants to achieve hospital-grade sanitization. She suggests working closely with your janitorial vendor to select the best products to protect families.

2. Personnel procedures (reviewing and educating hourly and salaried staff on sick leave guidelines)

Marilee Jennings said that in general, museums' personnel procedures are reviewed periodically and revised as needed. The fear of H1N1 outbreaks have sparked a number of questions about being flexible about a parent's need to stay home with a sick child. She asked call participants what policies and procedures they have for staff sick leave.

Pat Adams said that at Curious Kids' Museum, they employ many part-time and hourly people. They have vacation benefits for part-time staff who have worked in the museum for 2 years, based on the average number of hours worked per week.

Marci Donaho said that at The Jasmine Moran Children's Museum employees receive paid time off using a formula based on the average hours worked and adjusted whether you have been there for 5, 10 or 15 years.

Sheridan Turner said that at Kohl Children's Museum, part-time employees accrue sick leave, based on number of hours that they work on average per week. Additionally, the museum has a sick leave pool that employees can anonymously donate to and others can use. They haven't had to tap into the pool for a flu situation; more often staff with serious medical conditions use it before short-term disability leave is activated.

Tonya Matthews said that Cincinnati Museum Center (OH) has had a standing policy that if you use sick leave, you must come back with a doctor's note. However, they are considering waiving that policy in the case of the flu.

Participants shared some of their museums' policies regarding taking time off from work to care for a sick child:

- Leslie Bushara said that Children's Museum of Manhattan has a flexible parent leave policy.
- Jennifer Caleshu said that Bay Area Discovery Museum recently polled staff who are parents and might have to stay home should their children get sick or schools might close. For these staff, the museum is installing a remote computer software.
- Julia Bland reported that Louisiana Children's Museum (New Orleans) allows parents to use sick leave for taking care of kids.
- Ruth Shelly from Madison Children's Museum (WI) said that the museum lets employees use sick time for taking care of an immediate family member.

The following museums are helping employees obtain and/or pay for flu shots:

- Sheridan Turner said that Kohl Children's Museum is offering seasonal flu shots to help protect employees and families, as well as informing people to stay home if they feel ill or their child feels ill.
- Marilee Jennings added that Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose is looking into underwriting flu vaccines for staff, as many are part-timers who do not have health insurance sponsored by the museum.
- Kathie Williams said that EdVenture Children's Museum is reimbursing staff up to \$25 toward flu shots.
- Lesly Attarian said that Please Touch Museum has a flu shot program underwritten by University of Pennsylvania. She recommended contacting local university hospitals to see if they could support a similar program.

3. Guidelines for closing museum (schools, state/local government)

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Joel Censius from Betty Brinn Children's Museum said that Milwaukee is a metropolitan community with many confirmed cases of H1N1. During the outbreak back in the spring, the museum identified a contact at the city health department who they can use to help the museum make decisions about whether to close the museum for public health reasons. In the spring their contact did not advise them to close, despite closures of all local school districts. In the case of a future outbreak, Betty Brinn plans to follow the health department's recommendations. Additionally, Milwaukee school systems are saying that if there is another outbreak, they will likely not close and instead educate the public about hand washing and other prevention measures. Leslie Bushara added that Manhattan school systems were saying the same thing.

Mandy Jo Euresti said that Children's Museum of Brownsville did decide to close for a week in May because of the H1N1 outbreak. This decision was based on local school closures.

Nancy Johnson at Imagine Children's Museum (Everett, WA) asked the group if a museum closure lasted more than two weeks whether museums would follow their protocol for snow closure in regards to staff pay.

- Kim Stull said that in event of snow, DuPage Children's Museum pays benefits-eligible staff but not part-timers. However, if there is short notice on the closure and part-time staff are on their way to the shift or working at the time, they will be paid through the end of their shift.
- Leslie Bushara said that Children's Museum of Manhattan would not be in position to pay part-time staff if there was an extended closure.

Julia Bland noted that her insurance company confirmed that business interruption insurance only kicks in when there is physical damage to the building. Cancelled school visits from a closure authorized by the health department would not be covered by this type of insurance.

C. Strategic Planning

I. Communicating to board/board response

Marilee Jennings said that at Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose's last board meeting, the staff rolled out what they are doing as far as prevention for H1N1 and cleaning protocols. The board also completed a budget scenario of how they would pay staff in the case of museum closure.

2. Examining museum's reserve fund (preparing for potential loss of income - admission, rental, field trip, etc)

Sheridan Turner said that at Kohl Children's Museum, one of the things the board did in response to concerns about the economy was to look at several crisis scenarios for 2009 budgeting, including managing through a natural disaster such as a flu pandemic. The museum keeps at least two months of operating budget in reserves.

VII. Closing, Julia Bland

Julia Bland thanked everyone on the call for participating and sharing their ideas. She said that ACM would like to revisit the H1N1 preparedness issue to see where children's museums are, to stay on top of the issue and to share as much information as possible.

ACM will continue the discussion on Linked In and will post sample press releases, signage copy and other resources that member museums share the Members Only section of the ACM Web site.