

Most U.S. schools unprepared for pandemics: study

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Protective gear, medication stockpiles, staff disaster training all lacking.

(HealthDay)—Many U.S. schools are not prepared for another pandemic, according to a new study.

Saint Louis University researchers analyzed survey responses from about 2,000 school nurses at primary, elementary, middle and high schools in 26 states and found that less than half of the schools include [pandemic preparedness](#) in their school plan and only 40 percent have updated their school plan since the deadly 2009 H1N1 [swine flu pandemic](#).

Only about 30 percent of schools stockpile any [personal protective equipment](#), 1.5 percent stockpile medication in anticipation of another pandemic, about 23 percent of schools have no staff members trained on the school's disaster plan, and nearly 34 percent of schools train students on infection prevention less than once a year.

However, while slightly over 2 percent of schools require school nurses to receive the annual flu vaccine, nearly 74 percent of school nurses said they were vaccinated for the 2010-2011 [flu season](#), according to the study in the September issue of the [American Journal of Infection Control](#).

"Findings from this study suggest that most schools are even less prepared for an infectious disease disaster, such as a pandemic, compared

to a natural disaster or other type of event," study author Terri Rebmann, an associate professor of environmental and occupational health, said in a journal news release. "Despite the recent H1N1 pandemic that disproportionately affected school-age children, many schools do not have plans to adequately address a future biological event."

U.S. schools must continue to address gaps in infectious disease emergency planning, the researchers concluded. School preparedness for all types of disasters, including pandemics, is mandated by the U.S. Department of Education.

More information: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has more about [flu pandemics](#).

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