



H1N1 Session:

Information, Technology and Response Issues with H1N1 – The Impact on Local Health

2:00-2:50pm, Baker Room

Speakers:

Michele Samarya-Timm, Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Educator in Franklin Park, NJ

Tacynda Davis, Director of Environmental Health Programs for the National Swimming Pool Foundation in Colorado Springs, CO

Ann Aikin, Health Communications Specialist, National Center for Health Marketing, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA

Author:

Dr. Tom Keating, founder of Citizens, Learners, and Educators Against Neglect, covered the conference with Mr. Bob Wells, President of Wells Communication, Inc., of Atlanta. Project CLEAN is a national effort to improve public school restrooms that are too often filthy, inadequate, and chronically hazardous to student health.

'How-tos' Come in Threes – Yet Boil Down to One

by Tom Keating

While questions in the first session “Science behind H1N1,” were all about “What?”, this three-person panel focused on “How?” – how a county, a foundation, and a division answered the many requirements which faced them from their publics. There were many how-to suggestions, which often boiled down to one recommendation – “Wash Your Hands.”

Ms. Samarya-Timm reviewed past pandemics and serious incidents of flu throughout the world, as well as annual seasonal flu in the United States. The approximately fifty thousand residents in Franklin County, New Jersey, as in most public health jurisdictions, depend on CDC and WHO data as “portals of information,” according to Samarya-Timm. She lightened the afternoon session with cartoons and lively anecdotes, which she had used when communicating with county residents in New Jersey.

Whatever the topical emphasis was during her sessions with Jerseyites, Samarya-Timm worked hand washing into PSAs, exhibits, speeches, and Internet social media. She also stressed the importance of public health workers, who serve as the lead agency in such disasters.

Ms. Samarya-Timm shared the County web page <http://www.franklintwpnj.org/Health-influenza-updates.html>. It listed additional flu prevention resources, protection advice, cartoon-type posters, detailed brochures, and phone contact information 732.873.2500, extension 372 for Michele and a hot line at the same number, extension 209.

Michele Samarya-Timm captured the mood of many when she finished her remarks honestly and said, “I’m scared [about the fall and winter], but we’ll do as well as we can.” Then she roused the audience again with her cheer: “WASH YOUR HANDS.”

The panel transitioned from one county in New Jersey to hundreds of thousands of public pools nationwide. Tacynda Davis, with the National Swimming Pool Foundation, reported that no case of influenza virus infection had been associated with water exposure. She shared that “Recreational water that has been treated at CDC recommended disinfectant levels does not likely pose a risk for transmission of influenza viruses.”

Local communities were facing summer heat with normal pool chemicals, filtration methods, and measurement parameters. For example, Ms. Davis quoted Question 12 from the CDC’s 16 June 2009 Fact Sheet: “...recent studies have demonstrated that free chlorine levels recommended by CDC (1-3 parts per million [ppm or mg/L] for pools ... are adequate to disinfect avian influenza A (H5N1) virus.”

Reminders about sneezing and coughing, and perhaps surface cleaning measures completed the chat as pleasantly as a mid-afternoon dunk in a neighborhood pool. Following her presentation, as Ms. Davis left the room because of a scheduling conflict, her last words echoed, “*Wash Your Hands.*” Further information is available at The National Swimming Pool Foundation (www.nspf.org) and American Red Cross (www.redcross.org) or at CDC 1.800.232.4636.

Technology – at least social media – took center stage in the last presentation. The CDC’s four-year old Media Branch uses it all: video, widgets, blogs, webinars, buttons, UTube, ecards, podcasts, Flickr, and Twitters. Examples can be found at www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/h1n1 and http://www.myspace.com/cdc_ehealth.

The presenter, Ms. Ann Aikin, Communications Specialist, Division of eHealth Marketing, National Center for Health Marketing, at the Centers for Disease and Prevention Control, also cited a Health-e-Card “widget,” which displays tips about H1N1 influenza (swine Flu) directly to a person or agency’s web page, and updates the content automatically.

A few of the ten graphic pictures with pithy messages in English or Spanish, referred to as “buttons” on the CDC social media page, were shared. Admonitions such as “Cover it,” “Stay home,” and of course “Wash ‘em” reminded the workshop attendees of the need for clarity and brevity in this social networking aspect of the information age.