

Influenza (Flu) Prevention and Control in K-12 Settings

What can teachers and other school officials do to reduce the spread of influenza?

1. **Recognize the symptoms of flu.** The symptoms of flu are fever (greater than 100°F or 37.8°C), cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Sometimes diarrhea or vomiting may occur; however, these symptoms are usually not the main problem.
2. **Prevent others from becoming sick.** Children with symptoms of flu (see #1) should be removed from the classroom as soon as possible. Send the child to the school nurse or designated school official. Keep sick children separate from others while waiting for someone to take them home.
3. **Contain ill persons.** Designate an area where ill children can stay while waiting to leave school. This area should be away from common rooms or areas where others could be exposed.
4. **Designate staff to watch ill persons** until they can be sent home. Limit the number of people involved. Designated staff should not be at high risk of flu. People at high risk for contracting flu include pregnant women, people who have weakened immune systems, people with chronic health conditions among others.
5. **Follow exclusion guidelines.** Inform parent/guardian that the child is to be excluded from school and extracurricular activities, such as sports activities, academic clubs, school dances, until at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. The sick child's fever must go away without using fever-reducing medications, even if the child is taking an antiviral medication.

What can you do to prevent or reduce the spread of flu in your school?

1. **Get the flu vaccine every year.** The single best way to protect against seasonal flu is for children and staff to get a seasonal influenza vaccine every year. Flu vaccination is recommended for all children aged 6 months and older.
2. **Wash your hands.** Wash your hands several times a day using soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds. Check restrooms regularly to ensure soap dispensers are full and paper towels are always available. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective.
3. **Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.** Alcohol-based hand gels may be used in classrooms to minimize lesson disruption. Hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol is effective in killing germs on hands when they are not visibly soiled. Important times to practice good hand hygiene are after coughing, sneezing, or contact with infected surfaces (i.e., desks, doorknobs).
4. **Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.** Make sure tissues are available in all classrooms. Tissues should be thrown away immediately, and then followed by cleaning your hands. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow or shoulder, not into your hands.
5. **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.** Germs are spread this way.
6. **Stay home when you are sick.** Any student, teacher, or staff member reporting flu-like symptoms should stay at home or be sent home until at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. The sick person's fever must go away without the use of fever-reducing medications, even if the individual is taking an antiviral medication.
7. **Clean surfaces frequently.** In the school, clean commonly used surfaces such as door handles, handrails, eating surfaces, desks, etc., frequently with detergent-based cleaners or EPA registered disinfectants that are normally used in the school setting. Special cleaning products are not needed. Use cleaning products according to the directions on the product label. For bleach solutions, mix 1/4 cup chlorine bleach with 1 gallon of cool water. Bleach solutions should be changed daily. Additionally, extensive cleaning of school settings by wiping down floors and walls is not necessary as this has not been demonstrated to decrease the spread of influenza.
8. **Remember the school bus.** Clean commonly handled interior surfaces (i.e., door handles, handrails, etc.) between groups of students. Consider making tissues and alcohol-based hand gel available on buses since hand washing facilities are not available.
9. **Report high absentee rates to your local health department.** Your health department will work with you to help stop the spread of illness.