

Respiratory Illness Prevention and Control in Schools and Child Care Settings



Infectious Disease
Prevention and Response

What can teachers and other child care workers do to reduce the spread of respiratory illnesses like influenza (flu), COVID-19, Strep and RSV?

Recognize the symptoms. Common respiratory illness symptoms 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.

Prevent others from becoming sick. Children with symptoms of respiratory illness (see #1) should be removed from the classroom as soon as possible. Keep sick children separate from others while waiting for someone to take them home.

Contain ill persons. Designate an area where ill children can be watched while waiting for someone to take them home. This area should be separate from other people in the child care setting.

Designate a staff person to care for ill children until they can be sent home. Limit the number of people that come into contact with the sick person. Designated staff should be a healthy person not at high risk for respiratory illness. People who are at high-risk for contracting a respiratory illness include pregnant women, people who have weakened immune systems, people with chronic health conditions among others.

Follow exclusion guidelines. Inform parent/guardian that the child is to be excluded from the child care setting and extracurricular activities, such as field trips, 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 antiviral or antibiotic medication.

What can you do to decrease the spread of respiratory illness?

Stay up to date on vaccines. The single best way to protect against the respiratory illness is for children and child care workers to get seasonal vaccines each year.

Wash your hands. Wash your hands several times a day using soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds. Check restrooms regularly to ensure that soap dispensers are full and paper towels are always available. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective.

Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Alcohol-based hand gels may be used in classrooms. 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 surfaces that may have germs (i.e., desks, doorknobs).

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 or washing your hands. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow or shoulder, not into your hands.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs are spread this way.

Stay home when you are sick. Any attendee, 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 antiviral or antibiotic medication.

Clean surfaces often. In the child care center, 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 child care setting. Special cleaning products are not needed. Use cleaning products according to 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 the child care settings by wiping down floors and walls is not necessary as this has not been shown to decrease the spread of respiratory illness.

Remember the child care 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.

Report high absentee rates to your local health department. Your health department will work with you to help stop the spread of illness

For more information visit oklahoma.gov/health/infectiousdisease or call 405.426.8710.