



# Influenza

## Recommendations for Schools

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The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Influenza affects mainly the nose, throat, chest, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each year.

### Symptoms of Influenza

Symptoms of influenza include:

- Fever (typically  $\geq 100^{\circ}$  F)
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults

### Emergency Warning Signs of Influenza

In **children**, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

### Infectious Period

Students and staff may be able to infect each other beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others with flu viruses for an even longer time.

### How can you prevent the flu?

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated each year. The “flu” shot is an inactivated vaccine (containing killed influenza virus) that is injected. The flu shot is approved for use in people six months of age

and older, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.

About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop that protect against influenza virus infection. Flu vaccines will not protect against flu-like illnesses caused by non-influenza viruses.

### **If you get the flu:**

- Stay home from work or school
- Get plenty of rest and water
- Over-the-counter medications may relieve symptoms
- Consult your health care provider

### **Vaccination**

Yearly flu vaccination should begin as soon as vaccine is available, usually early in the fall. This will provide protection for the entire flu season.

### **Who should get vaccinated?**

People of all ages get sick with the flu and school-aged children have high rates of influenza. Yearly flu vaccination is recommended for almost everyone over 6 months of age, and is especially important for those people at high risk for developing flu-related complications, such as children younger than five, adults 65 years of age and older, pregnant women, and people with certain medical conditions like heart and lung problems, or diabetes.

### **What should be done to prevent or reduce the spread of influenza in schools?**

- **Stay home when ill.** Any employee, student, teacher, or staff suspected of having influenza should not attend school.
- **Wash hands often.** Wash hands several times a day using soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds (this is generally around the time it takes to sing the ABCs). Dry hands with paper towels or automatic hand dryers if possible. In school, allow regular breaks for the students and teachers to wash hands. Young children should be instructed and assisted to ensure proper hand hygiene. Restrooms should be checked regularly to ensure that soap and paper towels are always available.
- **Throw away tissues.** Influenza can be spread from coughs or sneezes. Make sure tissues are available in all classrooms. Students and staff should cover their mouths with their upper arm or a tissue when coughing and use a tissue when sneezing or blowing their noses. Tissues should be thrown away immediately followed by proper hand hygiene.
- **Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.** Alcohol-based hand gels may be used in classrooms to minimize disruption. Hand sanitizer is effective in killing germs on hands when they are not visibly soiled. Appropriate times to use hand sanitizer are after coughing, sneezing, or contact with infected surfaces (e.g., desk, doorknob).
- **Report absence of 10 percent or greater.** Schools with 10 percent or more of their total enrollment absent on a given day due to illness should report this to the Iowa Department of Public Health [website](#) or by calling 1-800-362-2736. Reporting outbreaks helps us to understand the impact of influenza on our communities.

- **It is not necessary to cancel school due to influenza cases.** Closure of individual schools in the event of an outbreak has not proven to be an effective way of stopping the spread of influenza. The decision to close a school should be made by the appropriate school officials based on other considerations.
- **Avoid close contact.** Ill students should be excluded from sports activities, choir or any activities that may involve close contact, since transmission of influenza may be easier in these situations. All students and staff should avoid sharing of saliva, i.e., sharing glasses, water bottles, other drinks, spoons/forks, or kissing, etc.
- **Don't forget about the school bus.** School buses, because of the enclosed space, may allow for easy spread of influenza. Tissues should be available on the buses, and students should be encouraged to cover nose and mouth while coughing or sneezing. Disinfect commonly handled interior surfaces (i.e., door handles, hand rails, etc.) between groups of students, if possible. Consider making alcohol-based hand gel available on buses since hand washing facilities are not available.
- **Clean surfaces frequently.** Routinely clean surfaces that are commonly touched including desks, doorknobs, computer keyboards, stair handrails, and faucets.

**Contact information:**

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