



**The Center
for Health and Health Care in Schools**

School Health Issues: Flu Season and Schools

Flu is an unwelcome visitor to many homes and communities this winter. Schools can help educate students, their families, and school staff about how to reduce the chance of getting the flu as well as reduce the likelihood of spreading flu to others. Additional information from the experts is available from the links below.

FIVE FAST FLU FACTS

From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm

* Flu symptoms include fever, headache, chills, body aches, tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, and nasal congestion.

* Flu is spread when a person who has the flu coughs, sneezes, or speaks and sends the flu virus into the air. The virus enters the nose, throat or lungs of a person and multiplies. Flu spreads less frequently when a person touches a surface that has flu viruses on it.

* If you get the flu: rest, drink plenty of liquids, and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

* Antibiotics like penicillin will not cure the flu. The best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu shot. Over-the-counter medications may relieve symptoms of flu. The National Institute for Allergies & Infectious Diseases recommends acetaminophen (Tylenol) for children; aspirin or acetaminophen for adults. Decongestants, cough suppressants, and use of a humidifier can provide symptomatic relief.

* In addition to flu shots, three antiviral medicines are available by prescription that will help prevent flu infection: Tamiflu, Flumadine and Symmetrel.

Things to keep in mind for school-age children

- * Do NOT give aspirin to a child or teenager who has the flu. To learn why, click here <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/flu.htm>
 - * Most antihistamines cause sleepiness. If a child still has a stuffy nose when she returns to school, parents may want to ask their child's doctor to prescribe a non-sedating antihistamine.
 - * Encourage children to cover coughs and sneezes, wash hands frequently, and keep hands away from eyes, nose and mouth.
 - * A sick child is advised to stay at home during the first days of illness when symptoms are most severe and the infection is most contagious. Children can return to school when symptoms are improving and no fever has been detected for 24 hours.
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Things for schools to keep in mind

The Iowa and Vermont Departments of Health have posted the following guidance for schools. Adapted by CHHCS for a national audience.

- * Any employee, student, teacher, or staff suspected of having the flu should not attend school.
- * 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 ABC's). 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 washing. Restrooms should be checked regularly to ensure that soap and paper towels are always available.
- * The flu can be spread from coughs or sneezes. Make sure tissues are available in all classrooms. Students and staff should cover their mouths when coughing and use a tissue when sneezing or blowing their noses. Tissues should be thrown away immediately following proper hand washing (alcohol hand gels may be used in the classrooms to minimize disruption).
- * Schools may be required by their local health departments to report flu absences when they reach a locally determined number. Reporting outbreaks assists in disease surveillance and understanding the impact on the community.

- * Staff and students (especially those with medical conditions and anyone else who wants to lower their risk of getting the flu) should get the flu shot. Remember, it is never too late in the flu season to be vaccinated. Check with your local health department on availability of vaccine: www.cdc.gov/other.htm#states
 - * Closure of individual schools in the event of an outbreak has not proven to be an effective way of stopping the flu but that decision should be made by the appropriate school officials based on other considerations.
 - * Schools should be extra-vigilant that ill students be excluded from sports activities, choir or any activities that may involve close contact, since transmission of the flu may be easier in these situations. All students and staff should avoid sharing glasses, water bottles, drinks, spoons/forks, etc.
 - * School buses, because of the enclosed space, may allow for easy spread of the flu. 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, handrails, etc.) between loads of students, if possible.
 - * In the school, clean commonly used surfaces such as door handles, handrails, eating surfaces, desks, etc., frequently with disinfectant. (Bleach solutions or commercial disinfectants are appropriate.)
 - * Who should get the flu shot? Everyone. (For more information contact your health care provider or local health department at www.cdc.gov/other.htm#states.)
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For more information:

How to tell the difference between a cold and flu. [Spanish version available]
<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/publications/cold/sick.pdf>

Health Matters: Flu. From the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.
<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/flu.htm>

Influenza: The Disease. From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/flu/fluinfo.htm>