

# Influenza

## Prevention and Control of Influenza and Other Respiratory Outbreaks in Schools

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### Influenza in Schools

Outbreaks of influenza and respiratory illness are common in the winter months. There are many strategies for limiting spread of illness to consider when school absences due to illness reaches or exceeds 10 percent of the school enrollment. Flu viruses spread mainly from person to person through coughs and sneezes of infected people. Sometimes people get infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

### 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.

### Key actions for schools to reduce transmission of influenza and many other respiratory diseases:

- **Encourage students, staff, and parents to get a yearly flu vaccine.** Consider holding influenza vaccine clinics or arranging them with your local public health agency (LPHA). Vaccination is best done before outbreaks occur. During outbreaks, vaccination of children can help to control the outbreak or limit spread within a school district or county. Target more than the affected school to yield the best results.
- **Encourage students and staff to cover coughs and sneezes.** Teach students and staff to cover their mouths when coughing or sneezing into upper arm or a tissue. Make sure tissues are available at all times. Tissues should be disposed of immediately, followed by proper hand washing.
- **Increase cleaning.** Routinely clean surfaces that are commonly touched including desks, doorknobs, computer keyboards, stair handrails, and faucets.
- **Notify and educate parents.** Send an informational letter home to parents in September or October before influenza season and during outbreaks. Be sure to include symptoms of influenza, staying home when ill, and the importance of yearly influenza vaccines, especially for children with health problems like asthma.
- **Stay home when ill.** Any employee, student, teacher, or staff suspected of having influenza should not attend school until at least 24 hours after fever has resolve without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

- **Promote frequent hand washing.** Teach and encourage children and staff to wash hands regularly with warm water and soap. This means using warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds each time. Important times to wash hands are before and after eating, recess, gym class and every other situation involving frequent student-to-student interaction. Be a good role model. Consider the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers in the classroom when soap and water are not readily available.
- **Limit gatherings.** Limit assemblies, large group gatherings and interactions with other schools during periods of high absence (when absence is at or above 10%).
- **Utilize resources.** Some of the resources available to you are your LPHA, the [Iowa Department of Public Health Influenza website](#), and the [Centers for Disease Control school influenza website](#).

School absence due to illness meeting or exceeding 10% should be reported to the Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology at the Iowa Department of Public Health. Please report the following for each day the absences meet or exceed 10%:

1. Reporter name
2. School name and location
3. Number absent due to illness and number enrolled
4. Common illness complaints

Submit reports on the [IDPH Influenza for Schools website](#) or by calling 1-800-362-2736.

**Contact information:**

Iowa Department of Public Health  
Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology  
321 E 12th St  
Des Moines, IA 50319  
(800) 362-2736