

Influenza in Schools

What can schools do to prevent spread of influenza?

- Help promote influenza vaccination for all students, staff, and families throughout flu season.
- Be aware of flu symptoms: Fever, headache, fatigue, cough, sore throat, and body aches.
- Promote hand hygiene, covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve, and staying home when sick among both students and staff.
- Make sure students and staff have tissues to cover coughs and sneezes as well as liquid soap, paper towels, and time to wash their hands.
- Routinely clean and disinfect commonly used areas and frequently touched surfaces, whether or not anyone has influenza in your school. Many bacteria and viruses can live on surfaces for some time – including those that cause flu.
- When cleaning and disinfecting, be sure to follow package instructions for contact time and dilution.

Do schools need to provide antibacterial soap?

No. There is no need to use special antibacterial soap; regular soap is effective. Antibacterial products have not been proven to prevent the spread of infection better than plain soap.

Should students with influenza-like illness be excluded from school?

Influenza-like illness (ILI) is defined as a fever (at least 100°F) and a cough or sore throat.

- Yes, students and staff with ILI should stay home from school and school-based activities.
- Students and staff who become ill during the day should be immediately isolated from others and sent home.

- Students and staff can return to school 24 hours after their fever is gone without fever-reducing medication, such as Tylenol or Advil. Students and staff should also be well enough to participate in school before returning.

Should schools close due to flu?

MDH does not recommend closing schools to prevent influenza transmission. However, your school may choose to close or dismiss students if a large number of absences prevent normal school functioning.

When should schools report influenza-like illness in students or staff?

All K-12 schools should report to the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) each day throughout the school year when they reach these thresholds:

- (For all schools, including elementary): Report when 5% or more of the total school enrollment is absent with influenza-like illness, or
- (For elementary schools only): Report if three students from one classroom are sent home or absent with influenza-like illness on a given day.

You will find reporting instructions and forms at www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/flu/school/schoolsurv.html.

Where can schools get current information on influenza?

MDH has a special website on influenza for school health personnel. We recommend that you subscribe to receive email updates when it has been updated at www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/flu/school/index.html. (Look for the small red envelope and the word “subscribe.”) On this website you will find flu-related guidance, reporting forms, templates, and fact sheets.