



The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) is currently reporting widespread influenza (flu) activity in all regions of the state. While it is not possible to predict when influenza activity will peak or end, schools and childcare settings can limit the impact of influenza on students and staff. Included in this message are NJDOH recommended action steps for schools and childcare centers, resources to assist school and childcare centers in dealing with the flu, and a document containing frequently asked questions that can be shared with parents.

NJDOH recommends that schools and childcare settings increase education on respiratory hygiene and monitor attendees for sudden fever and respiratory illness symptoms.

Staff and children (as developmentally appropriate) should all be taught and asked to follow these steps that prevent the transmission of infections such as influenza:

- Cover your coughs and sneezes.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Wash hands frequently, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Stay home if you're sick, especially with a fever.

Staff and parents should be made aware of the symptoms of influenza. Symptoms associated with the flu can include:

- Fever (although not everyone with flu has a fever)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Headache
- Chills
- Tiredness
- Sometimes diarrhea and vomiting

School or childcare attendees and staff with sudden fever and respiratory illness symptoms should be sent home with instructions to stay at home in accordance with the NJDOH school exclusion criteria, until fever free for 24 hours without fever reducing medication. Instructions should be given to seek medical care with worsening of symptoms.

It is not too late to get vaccinated. All people 6 months of age and older are recommended to annually receive the influenza vaccine. Getting vaccinated yourself protects people around you,

including those who are more vulnerable to serious flu illnesses, like babies and young children, older people, and people with certain chronic health conditions. While flu vaccine is not perfect and some people who get vaccinated may still get the flu, there is some data to suggest that flu vaccination may make the illness milder.

Additional recommendations to help reduce the spread of flu in schools include:

- Separate sick students and staff from others until they can be picked up to go home.
- Provide adequate supplies, including clean and functional handwashing stations, soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Include handwashing time in student schedules.
- Encourage routine surface cleaning through education, policy, and the provision of supplies.
- Match your cleaning activities to the types of germs you want to remove or kill.
  - Flu viruses are relatively fragile, so standard practices, such as cleaning with soap and water, can help remove and kill them.
  - Studies have shown that the flu virus can live and potentially infect a person for only 2 to 8 hours after being deposited on a surface. Therefore, special sanitizing processes beyond routine cleaning, including closing schools to clean every surface in the building, are not necessary or recommended to slow the spread of flu, even during a flu outbreak.
- Establish relationships with state and local public health officials for ongoing communication.
  - Follow your local flu situation.
  - Update your emergency plans so that they are in place before an outbreak occurs.
- NJDOH does not recommend school closure for outbreaks of infectious disease. The decision to close a school is an administrative one that should be made only after consultation with public health officials and the district medical personnel.

To report suspected or confirmed outbreaks of influenza like illness, please contact the local health department in the jurisdiction in which the school is located. Contact information for local health departments can be found at: <http://localhealth.nj.gov/>.

### **School and/or Daycare Specific Resources**

#### **NJDOH Prevention and Control Measures for Outbreaks in School Settings:**

<http://nj.gov/health/cd/topics/outbreaks.shtml#2>

#### **General Guidelines for the Control of Outbreaks in School and Child Care Settings School Exclusion List**

[http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/School%20Exclusion%20List%20\\_revised%207.10.2017.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/School%20Exclusion%20List%20_revised%207.10.2017.pdf)

#### **CDC Information for Schools & Childcare Providers**

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/>

**Guidance for School Administrators to Help Reduce the spread of Seasonal Influenza in K-12.**

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/guidance.htm>

**Handwashing Resources**

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html>

<http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/handwashing.shtml>

**How to Clean and Disinfect Schools to Help Slow the Spread of Flu**

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/cleaning.htm>