

West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Recommendations for Schools on Influenza and Influenza-like Illness.

A severe influenza season is anticipated this year. Influenza (“the flu”) is a sudden respiratory disease that spreads easily. It is characterized by the sudden onset of fever, body aches, sore throat, headache and cough, and, in children, can also cause diarrhea and vomiting.

- 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, followed by proper hand washing (alcohol hand gels may be used in the classrooms to minimize disruption).
- Schools with 10 percent or more of their total enrollment absent on a given day due to illness should report this to their local health department and the Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program at (1-800-423-1271 or 304-558-5358). 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.
- 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 the sharing of saliva, i.e. sharing glasses, water bottles, other drinks, spoons/forks, or kissing, 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 the nose and mouth while coughing or sneezing. Disinfect commonly handled interior surfaces (i.e. door handles, hand rails, 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: *(for more information contact your health care provider or local health department).*

Everyone

- Persons 50 years of age or older.
- Anyone older than six months of age with chronic heart or lung problems, including asthma.
- Anyone older than six months of age who requires regular medical follow-up or was hospitalized during the preceding year because of diseases like diabetes, cancer, kidney problems, etc.
- Household members (including children) of persons in the above high-risk groups.
- Women who will be in the second or third trimester of pregnancy during the influenza season.

Students

- Persons six months to 18 years of age receiving long-term aspirin therapy, because of the risk of developing Reye's syndrome after influenza.
- Students or other persons in institutional settings (those who reside in dormitories or group homes).

Modified from Iowa Department of Public Health, Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology.