

Control of Influenza and Other Respiratory Outbreaks in Schools



Outbreaks of influenza and respiratory illness are common in the fall and winter months. It is important to act quickly when illness starts to increase in a school setting.

When to start

These recommendations should be considered once the number of students absent due to illness meets or exceeds 10% of the total number of students enrolled.

How long to continue

These recommendations should continue for approximately two weeks after illness rates start to go down in a school.

The following guidelines are intended to help reduce the spread of respiratory illness in schools. These measures will work to contain outbreaks of any type or strain of influenza and other respiratory illnesses.

- **Clean surfaces frequently.** Conduct thorough environmental cleaning daily. In the school, clean commonly used surfaces frequently with disinfectant. Include stair hand rails, doorknobs, eating surfaces, desks and other commonly touched surfaces. Cleaning frequency should be increased from what is normally done.
- **Hand washing.** Teach and encourage children and staff to wash hands regularly with warm water and soap for at least 15-20 seconds. Elementary students should wash hands upon entry to school, before lunch, after recess, and after any group activity that includes extensive contact with other students.
- **Use hand sanitizer.** Consider the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers in the classroom when soap and water are not readily available. Tissues should also be available in every classroom.
- **Separate ill and well by classrooms and grades.** Try to keep classrooms and/or grades affected by illness separate from those that are not as affected.
- **Limit student gatherings.** Limit or postpone school assemblies, large group gatherings, indoor athletic events or camps, mentoring programs and interactions with other schools in the community. Consider having special classes like music and art in the classroom instead of moving students to another classroom.
- **Notify and educate parents.** Send an information letter home to parents as early in the outbreak as possible. Be sure to include the following items:
 - Basic personal protection education for kids including coughing into elbows, using a tissue to cover sneezes, washing hands often and especially when a child returns home from school;
 - Symptoms of influenza and other respiratory viruses;
 - When a child has the flu or other respiratory infections, they should stay home. Children and adolescents with influenza should remain home for 24 hours after a fever has gone away (without the help of medication); and
 - The importance of yearly influenza vaccine, especially children with chronic health problems like asthma.
- **Utilize resources.** Use the resources at the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) as well as the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Visit the influenza web site at www.idph.state.ia.us or www.cdc.gov for fact sheets, student activities, and more.
- **Collaborate.** Work with the local public health agency (LPHA) to decrease transmission of these viruses and possibly decrease the school's outbreak impact on the community at large

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 school absence meets or exceeds 10%:

1. Reporter name and email address
2. School name and city
3. Number absent due to illness
4. Number of students enrolled
5. Common illness complaints

Submit reports to CADE by fax to 515-281-5698, phone at 1-800-362-2736, or by e-mailing cadediseasereports@idph.state.ia.us.