



Central Michigan District Health Department

Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities



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Dear Superintendent/School Administrator:

It is that time of year again, when illnesses like influenza and norovirus are on the prowl. The health department would like to provide you with resources to help your schools through this time of year, hopefully preventing outbreaks that cause large absenteeism.

Norovirus, one of the most common causes of the “stomach flu”, is extremely contagious. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cramping, abdominal pain, headache, body pain, and fever. It usually starts within 12 to 48 hours of exposure and typically lasts 1 to 3 days. The virus is found both in the stool and vomit of the infected person and it takes fewer than 20 viral particles to infect someone. Norovirus is very hardy and able to survive outside the human body and remain capable of infecting others for days to weeks.

Influenza, commonly called the “the flu, is an infection of the respiratory tract (nose, throat, and lungs) caused by the influenza virus. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Influenza typically starts very quickly, and includes symptoms such as: fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, often severe body aches, tiredness, headache, chills, and rarely diarrhea and vomiting. Influenza is spread from person-to-person when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled, generally up to 3 feet, through the air and land in the mouth or nose of people nearby. The virus can also be spread when a person touches droplets that have landed on another person or an object and then touches their own mouth or nose before washing their hands. The flu virus can survive outside the body up to 24 hours.

PREVENTION

HANDWASHING is one of the most important measures to prevent both of these illnesses. Students and staff should wash their hands as soon as they get to school, after using the restroom, and before the eating snacks or lunch. They should also wash their hands after blowing their nose or coughing into their hands. Time for hand-washing should be worked into the students’ and staff daily schedules to allow for this. Students and staff should be reminded to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and taught to cough and sneeze into the bend of their elbow when a tissue is not available.

VACCINATION is one of the best available preventative measures available for preventing influenza. The flu vaccine is recommended for EVERYONE over the age of 6 months.

PROPER DISINFECTION, especially of surfaces that have been contaminated by vomit, feces, or respiratory droplets is important. Following disinfection guidelines for norovirus will also disinfect influenza.

Please visit us at our website www.cmdhd.org

KEEPING SICK STUDENT AND STAFF HOME is also important to prevent further spread of illness. **Those with influenza or flu-like symptoms** should go home and stay home until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medicine. Individuals infected with **norovirus** or other forms of “stomach flu” should not return to school until free of symptoms such as diarrhea for at least 2 days (48 hours). If a child needs to be sent home due to illness, try to keep the sick student separated from well students until they can be picked up or sent home.

Here is further information that may be of assistance during this time of year:

- There is no state law mandating closure of school because of illness. The public health code [*P.A. 368 of 1978, as amended*] allows a local health department’s Health Officer to close schools in certain situations, but this power has not been exercised for decades. The decision is typically left to the school. However, once absenteeism reaches 30 percent, education is likely hindered because so many students must make up school work.
- A sudden increase in student absenteeism due to illness should be reported to the health department. The public health code [*P.A. 368 of 1978, as amended*] **does require** that a primary or secondary school, child daycare center, or camp shall report to their local health department, within 24 hours of suspecting, the occurrence of any of the serious communicable diseases as listed by the State of Michigan and the **unusual occurrence, outbreak, or epidemic** among those in attendance of **any** disease, infection, or condition. Conditions that must be reported are listed at: https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/Reportable_Diseases_Michigan_by_Pat_hogen_478489_7.pdf
- If the decision is made to close a school due to an influenza outbreak, **it should be closed for a minimum of four calendar days** (which may include a weekend). Influenza has an incubation period of one to four days. Keeping kids home four days will help stop the transmission of disease and allow for students that are incubating influenza to develop symptoms. Any students that develop influenza-like symptoms should be advised to stay home. All school-related activities, such as sporting events, should also be canceled.
- All students and staff should be encouraged to drink extra water during the day.
- Unless it is too cold to go outside, recess should be allowed. Running and exercising helps the body develop a stronger immunity.
- Nasal tissue should be readily available to staff and students, as well as opportunities for hand washing.

It is very important that school staff submit their weekly electronic Communicable Disease reports. Please have them be sure to specify the nature of the illnesses they are reporting. Be sure to differentiate between “flu” (influenza) and gastro-intestinal illness (“stomach flu”).

Listed below are additional resources for you, your staff, and to share with parents. If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact your local branch of your health department.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Morse, MD, MPH, FAAFP
Medical Director

Recommended Resources:

- Keep Flu Out of School Toolkit <http://www.preventchildhoodinfluenza.org/keep-flu-out-of-school>
- Cover Your Cough Posters: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/dtopics/infectioncontrol/cover/gen/index.html>
- Hand Washing Posters: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/posters.html>
- A Flu Guide for Parents <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/family/flu-guide-for-parents-2018.pdf>
- General Noro Facts https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/NorovirusFactsheet_281017_7.pdf
- Disinfection Posters <https://waterandhealth.org/resources/posters/>
- Managing Communicable Diseases in Schools https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/Managing_CD_in_Schools_FINAL_469824_7.PDF