



SCHOOL CULTURE, CLIMATE & STUDENT SERVICES

Office of Health Services 119 W Leigh Street, Suite 307
Richmond, VA 23220
telephone: (804) 780-7801
fax: (804) 780-7803

Dear Parents:

Influenza (“the flu”) is more dangerous than the common cold for children. Each year, many children get sick with seasonal influenza. We have become aware of cold and flu symptoms in our schools and surrounding areas. Many of the symptoms seen in the nurse’s offices include: fever, runny nose, coughing, nausea, vomiting and sore throat.

To prevent the flu, teach your child to engage in good hygiene habits:

- Wash hands frequently
- Cover mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing. Use a paper tissue, throw it away and then wash hands
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth
- Avoid close contact with people that are sick

Students should not be in school if they are experiencing the following:

- A fever of 100.4 degrees or greater before taking a fever-reducing medication.
- Active vomiting within 24 hours
- Recurring diarrhea within 24 hours
- Flu-like illness (with or without fever) – headache, fatigue, cough, weakness, muscle aches and sore throat.
- Any nose discharge that is green or yellow (particularly preschool) and unable to be contained or personally cared for.

Please be prompt when picking up your ill child in order to minimize his or her chance of spreading or acquiring a contagious illness. Make sure that your child’s school has your current telephone number on file. Update your child’s emergency contact list as well if necessary.

Best practice indicates that a student should be free of symptoms of contagious disease (fever, vomiting, diarrhea, etc.) for 24 hours before returning to school.

The best way to prevent the flu is by getting vaccinated each year. Please visit your primary care physician, your local pharmacy, Richmond City Health District or other medical resources for additional questions and/or concerns.

Please see the fact sheet, on the reverse side, which will help you become more informed about influenza (flu) and flu vaccinations. Working together we can ensure that all of our children stay healthy.

What is influenza?

Influenza is commonly referred to as "the flu." It is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs. The flu can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccine each year.

What are the symptoms of flu?

Symptoms of flu may include fever (though not everyone with flu will have a fever), cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, fatigue (tiredness), chills, and sometimes diarrhea and vomiting. Symptoms usually appear 1 to 3 days after exposure. Although most people are ill for less than a week, some people have complications and may need to be hospitalized.

How is influenza diagnosed and treated?

Laboratory tests are available to diagnose influenza; however, doctors usually diagnose influenza from the person's symptoms. Rest, liquids, and over-the-counter medicines for fever and discomfort are the usual treatments. Prescription antiviral drugs are available and may reduce the severity of influenza. **Aspirin should not be given to children with fever-causing illnesses because of the possibility of a complication called Reye's syndrome.**

Who gets influenza?

Influenza can infect persons of all ages. The flu can be especially serious for babies, children, pregnant women, adults 65 years and older, people with certain long-term medical conditions (e.g., lung disease, heart disease, cancer, or diabetes), or those with weak immune systems. However, even healthy people can get the flu and should protect themselves by getting the flu vaccine every year.

How is it spread?

The flu virus spreads easily through exposure to discharges from the nose and throat of an infected person. It is often spread by coughing, sneezing or talking. A person might also get the flu by touching a surface or object that has the flu virus on it, and then touching their own mouth, eyes or possibly their nose.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

Influenza can spread from one person to another beginning one day before symptoms appear through about a week after the onset of symptoms. This means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

Who should be vaccinated against influenza?

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine every season. Everyone age 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine each year.

For more information about the flu and the benefits of the flu vaccine, talk to your health care provider or contact your local health department.