



Guidance for the Prevention, Recognition, and Management of Influenza in Philadelphia Schools 2016-2017

Last updated October 19, 2016

Background Information

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH), Division of Disease Control is providing this guidance to assist Philadelphia schools in understanding methods to prevent and control influenza (flu) within the school community during the 2016-2017 influenza season. It includes recommendations specific to seasonal influenza and is compatible with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH). As with previous seasons, school personnel are advised to be vigilant in the identification of influenza in students and in the implementation of prevention and control measures.

Symptoms

Symptoms of flu include fever ($\geq 100^{\circ}\text{F}$ under the arm or $\geq 101^{\circ}\text{F}$ orally), cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Children may also have vomiting and diarrhea.

Transmission

Flu is spread person to person through respiratory droplets expelled during coughing or sneezing. Flu can also be spread when a person touches something that has the flu virus on it and then touches their nose or mouth. Symptoms typically begin 2 days after contact with the flu virus. People with the flu are contagious from 24 hours before and until 7 days after they develop illness.

Treatment

Generally, people with the flu should get rest, drink lots of fluids, and may take over-the-counter medicine to relieve flu symptoms (e.g., acetaminophen for fever). Antiviral medications are medicines prescribed by a doctor to treat a flu infection or prevent the flu. Individuals at high-risk for serious flu complications include children younger than 5, adults 65 years of age or older, and pregnant women, as well as people with certain chronic health conditions including diabetes, asthma, neuromuscular disease, or a weakened immune system due to disease or medication. Individuals who are concerned about their illness or are at high-risk to develop complications of the flu should speak to their doctor immediately if they develop flu symptoms or are in close contact with a person diagnosed with flu. Their doctor will determine if antiviral medications should be prescribed.

Prevention

- **Vaccination.** The best way to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated. The 2016-2017 seasonal flu vaccines will protect individuals against either three strains (trivalent) or four strains (quadrivalent) of seasonal flu. All individuals ≥ 6 months of age are recommended to receive one dose of the seasonal flu vaccine. Children 6 months to 8 years of age who are not known to have received at least 1 dose of the 2015-2016 seasonal influenza vaccine, should receive 2 doses of the 2016-2017 seasonal influenza vaccine.
- **Hand Hygiene.** Individuals should wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers before eating or touching their face and after sneezing/coughing or wiping their nose.
- **Respiratory Etiquette.** Individuals should cover their mouth and nose with a clean tissue or their inside elbow when they cough and sneeze. Tissues should be discarded after a single use.
- **Stay Home When Ill.** Ill individuals should stay home and away from others when they are sick with flu symptoms. Generally, people are no longer contagious 7 days after symptom onset. The Division of Disease Control recommends that ill children with a fever ($\geq 100^{\circ}\text{F}$) be excluded from school for 24 hours after the resolution of fever without the use of fever reducing medications.

Recommendations for Philadelphia Schools

1. Communication between Schools and the Division of Disease Control

For issues pertaining to influenza, schools that have nurses employed by the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) should establish, in advance, clear lines of communication within their facility and with the SDP Office of School Health Services. The SDP School Health Coordinator from the School Health Office will serve as the single point of contact with the Division of Disease Control to assure the best management of issues should they occur. Schools that do not have a SDP school nurse should designate a specific point of contact to work with the Division of Disease Control if flu-related issues arise.

2. Education of Students, Parents, and Staff on Flu Prevention and Control

At the beginning of and throughout the school year, schools should prepare and disseminate general information regarding the symptoms of flu, spread of flu, and methods to prevent flu including vaccination. Schools are encouraged to post signs and educational materials about flu at prominent and visible locations, such as in bathrooms and at entryways. The Division of Disease Control can assist with developing materials or providing samples of signs.

3. Screening and Immediate Exclusion of Ill Students and Staff

- Students and staff with flu-like illness should not attend school. This is essential to preventing the introduction of flu virus into the school.
- All school staff (administration, faculty, and nurses) should be familiar with the symptoms of flu. Staff should actively seek to identify children who have fever, cough, sore throat, and other respiratory symptoms of influenza. These children should be immediately excluded from the classroom and referred for evaluation. School nurses should evaluate children with respiratory symptoms suggestive of flu. Nurses must be able to check temperatures and assess for the presence of cough, sore throat, or other signs of respiratory infection.
- Any student with suspected influenza should be physically separated from other children in the nurse's office or in a sick room. Ill persons should be placed in areas where at least 6 feet of distance can be maintained between the ill person and others. The ill person should be immediately sent home with a parent or guardian, according to usual school procedures. These children should not ride the school bus or public transportation home.
- Staff members who provide care to the ill student may choose to wear personal protective equipment, such as gloves, depending on their level of exposure. Staff should wash their hands thoroughly after contact with an individual suspected of having the flu.
- For children who have flu-like illness and underlying medical conditions (e.g., asthma, immunosuppressing condition, neuromuscular disease, diabetes, pregnancy), the school nurse or administrator should request that parents or guardians take these children to their doctor for evaluation and consideration of treatment with antiviral drugs.
- Faculty and staff should self-monitor for signs of flu-like illness and not report to work if ill. Staff who appear to have flu-like illness should also be sent home immediately.
- Any child or staff person with influenza-like illness should remain home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines. These persons should stay home and avoid contact with others even if they are using antiviral drugs. Upon return to school, the school nurse may reevaluate these individuals for presence of fever before readmission.
- All persons identified with flu-like illness should be asked whether they have recently touched or been near pigs (i.e. at a farm or fair) or had close contact with a sick person who has been near pigs. Furthermore, patients exhibiting flu-like symptoms should be asked about recent international travel. All persons with flu-like illness and a history of recent (one week before symptom onset) international travel or exposure to pigs should be reported to PSD and/or the Division of Disease Control (215-685-6740).

4. Environmental and Infection Control for Limiting the Spread of Flu in Schools

- Respiratory hygiene should be strongly promoted. Students and staff should be educated on the importance of covering their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Tissues should be discarded after use. Tissues and trash bins should be readily available in every classroom, office, and communal space.
- Students and staff should be encouraged to wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Schools should ensure that there are ample supplies of soap and paper towels near all sinks.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective at killing flu, and should be made available in settings where hand washing is not readily available.
- Facilities management staff should routinely clean schools as per their usual methods and with an EPA approved cleaner that is effective against flu virus. Special attention should be paid to frequently touched surfaces such as handrails, doorknobs, desks, and keyboards. Additional environmental control measures or the use of bleach for cleaning is not necessary.
- Schools should post signage regarding appropriate respiratory and hand hygiene practices.

5. Surveillance for Increased Influenza Activity in the School Community

Schools should monitor absenteeism and school nurse visit data on a daily basis. A significant increase in school absenteeism due to flu-like illness should be promptly reported to the SDP Office of School Health Services (for schools with SDP nurses) or the Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6740 (for schools that do not have SDP nurses). Staff within these offices will review the data with school staff and provide recommendations regarding disease containment in schools as described in the next section.

6. Disease Containment Measures during Times of Increased Flu Activity

If flu activity in the school increases or is concerning, the following actions may be considered:

- Cancellation or postponement of events (assemblies, sporting events, meetings, concerts) that bring students and staff from different classes into close proximity.
- Cancellation of field trips that involve transporting children on buses.
- Medically fragile children may be physically separated and work with dedicated staff.
- Communication to families and staff about the burden of disease at the school, the school's plan to monitor and control flu-like illness, and infection control recommendations for students and staff to decrease the spread of flu.
- Decisions about school dismissal should be made in conjunction with the Division of Disease Control (for all schools) and the SDP Office of Student Health (for SDP schools). Ultimately, factors that will influence a decision to dismiss schools are: (1) evidence of uncontrolled disease transmission, (2) risk of transmission or disease complications among school students is particularly high because of behavioral or other special health issues, (3) emergence of a more virulent strain of virus, or (4) public health measures call for social distancing measures that involve canceling large gatherings to control widespread community transmission.

Additional Resources

- Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Disease Control (215) 685-6740; <http://www.phila.gov/health> or hip.phila.gov
- Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH) Influenza Information <http://www.health.pa.gov/My%20Health/Diseases%20and%20Conditions/I-L/Pages/Influenza-Recommendations-for-Schools.aspx#.WAeVu0bD8y8>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Seasonal Influenza (Flu) <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/index.htm>