



Central Michigan District Health Department

Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities



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Guidance on Influenza for Schools

By Dr. Jennifer Morse, Medical Director, Central Michigan District Health Department

Central Michigan District Health Department recognizes that school administrators and staff are concerned about the flu. Here are some concepts and information that may be useful to school superintendents and staff regarding influenza and the need for closing schools during “flu” outbreaks.

- Influenza, commonly called “the flu,” is caused by the influenza virus, which infects the respiratory tract (nose, throat, lungs). It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.
- Influenza is spread from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes, such as when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled (generally up to 3 feet) through the air and deposited on the mouth or nose of people nearby. The virus also can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object and then touches their own mouth or nose before washing their hands.
- Illness from influenza and COVID-19 cannot be differentiated based on symptoms alone. Sick individuals must be tested for both illnesses to know if they are ill with one or both viruses.
- **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, the health department is available for consultation. Once absenteeism reaches 25 to 30 percent, education is likely hindered because so many students must make up schoolwork.**
- 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.
- **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.**
- Sick students and sick staff do not belong in school. Anyone who is sick should stay home. For more guidance in determining who should stay home and when to allow students and staff to return, please see [MDHHS: Managing Communicable Diseases in Schools](#)
 - One exclusion criterion is a child with a temperature of 101°F or greater AND behavior changes or other signs or symptoms (e.g., sore throat, rash, vomiting, or diarrhea).
 - If there is influenza-like-activity or COVID-19-like-activity in the school or in the community, criteria would also include a temperature over 100.4°F and respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, sore throat). The child should not return until 24 hours of no

fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.

- Students and staff should be reminded often to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Students should be taught to cough and sneeze into the bend of their elbow for times a tissue is not available. They should also be reminded to avoid touching the eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
- ALL students and ALL staff should wash their hands as soon as they get to school. Time for hand-washing should also be worked into the students' and staff daily schedules, particularly before the students eat snacks or go to lunch. They should also wash their hands after blowing their nose or coughing into their hands.
- Doorknobs and faucets should be cleaned with a bleach-containing solution (1/4 cup of household bleach in a gallon of water is strong enough to kill the influenza virus) or with an EPA-registered disinfectant effective against influenza.
- 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 help raise a child's temperature temporarily, which helps the body develop a stronger immunity.
- Facial tissue should be available on campus, as well as a place to dispose of the used tissue.
- **Influenza vaccination is the most effective way to prevent influenza. The families of children that have been vaccinated against influenza have been shown to be less likely to get influenza.** Your local health department branch office or pharmacy can provide influenza vaccination clinics for your employees.

Resources:

- MDHHS: Managing Communicable Diseases in Schools https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/Managing_CD_in_Schools_FINAL_469824_7.PDF
- National Association of School Nurses Seasonal Influenza Page <https://www.nasn.org/nasn-resources/resources-by-topic/seasonal-influenza>
- CDC: Information for Schools & Childcare Providers <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/index.htm>
- Families Fighting Flu, Inc. Flu Resources for Schools & Universities <https://www.familiesfightingflu.org/flu-resources-for-schools-universities/>
- Flu and Whooping Cough Vaccine poster for childcare staff <https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/mdhhs/Adult-and-Childrens-Services/Children-and-Families/Immunization-Information/childcare.pdf?rev=c6e906cfd4f44b65b0ceca1c5612c3d1>
- Flu vaccine posters <http://www.aimtoolkit.org/health-care/general-public.php>