

Influenza Information for School Health Personnel:

Introduction

Influenza (the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus. There are two main types or strains of influenza virus, types A and B. Influenza A and B viruses are responsible for seasonal flu epidemics each year. The flu season occurs in the fall and winter, with peaks of illness occurring anytime from late November through March.

Mode of Transmission

Influenza viruses are primarily spread from person to person by “droplets.” This happens when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled through the air and deposited on the mouth, nose or eyes of people nearby. Influenza viruses may also be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on an object and then touches their mouth, nose or eyes before washing their hands.

Length of Infectiousness

Most healthy adults may be contagious 1 day before symptoms develop, and up to 5-7 days after becoming sick. Children, especially younger children, may pass the virus for longer than 10 days. That means that people may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before they know they’re sick, as well as while sick. Some people can be infected with the flu virus but have no symptoms. During this time, those persons may still spread the virus to others.

Incubation Period

1-4 days (avg. 2)

Duration of Illness

3-7 days

Typical Symptoms

Usually onset with any of the following:

- Fever ($\geq 101^{\circ}\text{F}$)
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Dry cough
- Body aches
- Weakness
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
(more common in children)

Treatment

Treatment for flu primarily consists of supportive therapy such as rest, staying hydrated and using OTC analgesics as directed. Some individuals may benefit from antiviral medications such as Tamiflu. When used for treatment, antiviral drugs can lessen symptoms and shorten the time you are sick. Antiviral drugs also can prevent serious flu-related complications (like pneumonia). This is especially important for people with a high-risk health condition.

Diagnosis

The two main test types, both of which require swabbing of the nasopharynx, include:

1. **Rapid test:** can provide results in as little as 30 minutes.
2. **Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests:** are more sensitive and accurate, and are sent to commercial or public health labs.

Immunity

In general, a person infected with a particular strain of influenza will have some immunity to closely related viruses; this immunity may persist for one or more years. The degree of protection depends on the health of the person involved. It’s important to remember that influenza viruses are constantly changing, so immunity against one strain is less effective against new strains as influenza viruses evolve over time.

When to report to Clark County Public Health (CCPH)

Schools are required to report the presence of a contagious disease at the facility to their local health jurisdiction per [Washington Administrative Code \(WAC\) 246-110-020](#). CCPH defines an influenza outbreak in a school setting as $\geq 10\%$ of child/staff population with similar symptoms of influenza-like illness (ILI).

- ILI is defined as a fever of 100.0°F or greater and a cough or sore throat (in the absence of a known disease other than influenza).



All schools should immediately report suspect and/or confirmed outbreaks of influenza like illness to the CD Program at (360) 397-8182.

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Before an Outbreak Occurs

Schools should have policies and procedures in place for:

- Tracking the number of absences with reports of ILI symptoms.
- Excluding students with ILI until after the fever is gone (normally for 24 hours). See the [Infectious Disease Control Guide for School Staff](#).
- Implementing a notification system for sending parent notification letters and FAQ sheets.
- Communicating with students/families and faculty/staff the importance of having an annual influenza vaccine to control the spread of illness in schools.

During an Outbreak

Please report when absences of the students/staff population are $\geq 10\%$ with similar symptoms of ILI.

- Notify your facility licenser or certifier of an outbreak (if you have one).
- Exclude cases from school until after fever is gone (normally for 24 hours).
- Complete the [Influenza-like Illness Reporting Form](#) and fax to CCPH at (360) 397-8080.
- Distribute a notification letter and [FAQ sheets](#) to all parents/families about groups (e.g. classroom, grade level, and whole school) that were possibly exposed. If you have questions regarding appropriate audiences for distribution of letters and FAQ sheets, please call CCPH Communicable Disease at (360) 397-8182. A notification letter template is available at: <https://www.clark.wa.gov/public-health/resources>
- Reinforce cough etiquette education and hand hygiene education to reduce the spread of illness in the school.

After an Outbreak

- Evaluate your school's response.
- Develop action plans to address any identified areas of concern regarding school's readiness and response.
- Don't hesitate to use CCPH as a resource for reviewing outbreak response or supporting training needs.

For additional information visit:

- <https://www.clark.wa.gov/public-health/resources> for resources, tools and templates.
- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>