

February 11, 2019

Dear Parent/Caregiver and Staff:

Influenza activity in Virginia is widespread and is affecting our community. In multiple schools in Henrico County, children have become sick with influenza (the “flu”) and/or influenza-like illnesses.

Influenza is a virus that can live in a person’s respiratory tract. Thus, flu is usually spread via direct contact with an infected person who is sneezing and coughing, or from contact with hands or objects/surfaces contaminated with nose and throat secretions from an infected person.

We recommend the following infection control measures to prevent the spread of flu in the school population:

- Encourage good hygienic practices:
 - Wash hands with soap and water often, especially when exposed to someone who is sick
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when coughing or sneezing or use your inner arm (elbow crease), but do not use your hands.
 - Dispose of facial tissues that contain nasal secretions after each use. Wash hands afterwards.
 - Avoid touching the eyes, nose, or mouth.
 - Routinely clean commonly touched surfaces, toys, and other shared objects as recommended.
- Stay home if ill
 - Individuals should stay home from school, work and errands when sick and avoid close contact with people who are sick.
 - Ill students or staff should remain home until they are fever-free for a full 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- Encourage vaccination
 - The single best way to protect against flu is to get vaccinated each year.
 - Influenza vaccination is usually 70-90% effective in preventing the flu in healthy persons.
 - Receiving flu vaccine later in the season can still provide important protection since flu viruses can circulate as late as May.
 - Most individuals will be protected against influenza within 2 weeks after vaccination.
- Antiviral medications
 - These may also be used to prevent or treat the flu - talk to your healthcare provider for more information.
- Enhance influenza awareness
 - Please see the enclosed fact sheet on influenza.



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In addition to influenza, some gastrointestinal illnesses that cause vomiting and diarrhea are also circulating in the community. The most common cause of gastrointestinal illness in the school setting is norovirus, which causes illness that usually lasts one to three days. Norovirus can be spread by consuming contaminated food or liquids, touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching one's mouth, or having direct contact with another person who is infected and then touching one's mouth.

We recommend the following infection control measures to prevent the spread of norovirus in the school population:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water, especially after using the restroom.
- Routinely clean commonly touched surfaces, toys, and other shared objects with household chlorine bleach-based cleaners.
- Children and staff who are ill with diarrheal symptoms should be kept home and excluded from school and/or other group activities while they have diarrhea or vomiting and for 24 hours after the illness ends to avoid spreading the illness to others.

If you have any questions about influenza or gastrointestinal illnesses, please contact your child's doctor or the Henrico Health Department at 804-501-5216.

Sincerely,

Karen W. Criswell BSN, RN, NCSN

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