



County of Fairfax, Virginia

To protect and enrich the quality of life for the people, neighborhoods and diverse communities of Fairfax County

December 2018

Dear Parent or Guardian,

This is the time of year when we expect to see an increase in the number of respiratory illnesses in our community, including coughs, colds, sore throats and flu. While these illnesses are not unusual for this time of year, there are several things that you can do to protect your child and others.

To help control the spread of respiratory illnesses:

- **Have your child vaccinated against influenza (“the flu”):** Vaccination is the single best way to protect against the flu. *CDC recommends all persons aged 6 months and older receive the flu vaccine each year.* Flu vaccine is readily available at doctors’ offices and pharmacies. We encourage you to get it as soon as it is available in the fall or early winter.

- **Teach your child how to stop the spread of illness:**
 - Use tissues and dispose of them properly.
 - Cover your mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, or cough into your upper sleeve.
 - Do not cough or sneeze into your hands.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth to prevent the spread of germs.
 - Wash hands regularly with soap and water for 20 seconds.
 - Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers, when soap and water are not available (with supervision for younger children).
 - Do not share drinking glasses or eating utensils.

- **Clean and disinfect surfaces at home that people often touch:** Use regular household cleaning products or mix ¼ cup chlorine bleach with 1 gallon of cool water to wipe down often touched areas. Always follow label instructions for any disinfectant.

- **Look for signs of illness in your child:** Symptoms of flu include fever, headache, tiredness, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea may also occur. Symptoms of throat infections commonly include fever and sore throat without the stuffy nose and cough. The common cold usually does not present with fever.

- **Contact your doctor or healthcare provider if your child shows symptoms of a respiratory illness:**
 - Fever (100.4°F or greater) AND chills, cough, sore throat, headache, or muscle aches.

To stop from spreading illness to others, keep children home when they are ill. If your child has flu symptoms he or she should remain home and away from others until the fever has been gone for 24 hours (without acetaminophen [Tylenol®] or other treatment) and symptoms are better. If your doctor or healthcare provider prescribes treatment for your child, follow all directions for taking the medicine. If your child has been diagnosed with bacterial pharyngitis (“strep throat”) he or she should remain home for at least 24 hours after starting antibiotics so as not to spread disease to others.

A fact sheet on influenza with information about the flu vaccine is attached for your information. If you have any questions, please contact your school public health nurse or the Communicable Disease Epidemiology program at 703-246-2433, TTY 711.

Sincerely,

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Influenza Fact Sheet

What is influenza?

Influenza is commonly referred to as "the flu." It is caused by a virus. There are two main types of influenza virus: A and B.

When does influenza occur?

Influenza occurs most often in the late fall and winter months in the United States and sometimes continues into the spring.

Who gets influenza?

Anyone can get influenza. Illness is most serious in young children, older adults, people with chronic illnesses (e.g., lung disease, heart disease, cancer, or diabetes) or those with weak immune systems.

How is it spread?

Influenza spreads easily in secretions from the nose or throat, usually when an ill person coughs or sneezes. One also can get influenza from touching a surface, like a table or doorknob, that is contaminated with the secretions of someone who is ill and then touching their mouth, nose or eye.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear? What are the symptoms of influenza?

Symptoms usually appear 1 to 3 days after exposure. Influenza symptoms can include fever, headache, chills, cough, sore throat and body aches. Diarrhea is not common. Although most people are ill for less than a week, some people have serious illness and may need to be hospitalized.

How is influenza diagnosed and treated?

Lab tests are available to diagnose influenza; however, doctors usually diagnose influenza from the person's symptoms. Rest, liquids, and over-the-counter medicine (e.g., acetaminophen [Tylenol®]) are the usual treatments. Some prescription drugs may reduce the severity of influenza. Aspirin should not be given to children with flu-like illnesses because of the possibility of a serious complication called Reye's syndrome.

How long can a person spread influenza?

Influenza can spread from one person to another beginning about one day before to about a week after the illness starts.

Who should be vaccinated against influenza?

All children over than 6 months old and all adults are recommended by CDC for influenza vaccination (except for those who have a specific reason not to get the vaccine such as an allergy). Vaccination every year is important because: 1) influenza viruses change from year to year, and 2) protection from the vaccine decreases over time.

Particular effort should be made to vaccinate people at higher risk for influenza infection or complications. This includes all children aged 6 months-18 years, all persons aged >50 years, and:

- Women who will be pregnant during the influenza season;
- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities;
- People who have long-term heart or lung problems, including asthma; and,
- People who have other serious medical conditions, such as kidney disease, cystic fibrosis, diabetes, anemia, cancer, weak immune systems (including those with HIV), or a seizure disorder.

People in these higher risk groups also can be protected if those around them – in families and at work – are vaccinated against influenza.

What else can one do to stop the spread of influenza?

Good health habits can help prevent influenza. These include covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing; washing your hands often; avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth; staying home from work, school, and errands when you are sick; and avoiding close contact with people who are sick. Antiviral medications may also be used to prevent or treat influenza, but are not a substitute for vaccination. For more information, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (www.cdc.gov/flu/) or talk to a healthcare professional.