



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN RESOURCES  
Bureau for Public Health  
Commissioner's Office

Bill J. Crouch  
Cabinet Secretary

Catherine C. Slemp, MD, MPH  
Commissioner & State Health Officer (Interim)

MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** January 2, 2019

**TO:** West Virginia Superintendents and School Officials

**FROM:** Catherine C. Slemp, MD, MPH *Catherine C. Slemp*  
Commissioner and State Health Officer, Interim  
Bureau for Public Health

**RE:** Influenza Outbreaks in Schools, 2018-19 Season

Influenza seasons unpredictably vary in timing, duration and severity. The 2017-18 season was one of the most severe seen in recent years, with 185 influenza-associated pediatric deaths nationwide. With this in mind, West Virginia school systems should prepare for any upcoming influenza activity and have plans for influenza outbreak management in place. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has guidance for school administrators on their webpage at [www.cdc.gov/flu/school/guidance.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/guidance.htm).

Schools are strongly encouraged to regularly educate parents, students and staff on the following preventative actions:

- Receive an annual influenza vaccination
- Wash hands frequently
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or bent arm
- Avoid close contact with those who are ill
- Stay home from school or work when sick (at least 24 hours after a fever subsides)

When experiencing an influenza outbreak among students and staff, schools should consider the following recommendations:

1. Outbreaks should be immediately reported to your local health department (LHD). For a list of LHDs, visit <https://dhr.wv.gov/localhealth/Pages/Map.aspx>.
2. Schools should maintain routine general cleaning procedures during influenza outbreaks. Additional disinfection is not recommended to kill influenza viruses.
3. School closure is not recommended for influenza outbreaks unless there is not sufficient staff to instruct students or maintain a safe and healthy environment.
4. If a school cannot maintain a safe and healthy environment, a collective decision should be made regarding school closure through close communications with state and local school and health officials.

For questions or concerns, please contact your LHD or the Bureau for Public Health, Office of Epidemiology and Prevention Services at (304) 558-5358, ext. 1.