

Influenza

What teachers need to know

What is influenza?

Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is a respiratory infection caused by influenza viruses. These viruses are constantly changing, which allows for people to become ill from these organisms year after year. Seasonal flu shots are offered annually to protect against circulating flu strains.

Symptoms of Influenza

Influenza causes cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, fever, fatigue, headache, chills and muscle aches. Young children and persons with underlying health conditions may require hospitalization and are at increased risk of influenza complications including croup, ear infections, pneumonia, seizures, and death. While gastrointestinal upset may occur in children, the term “stomach flu” is often incorrectly associated with influenza and refers to a separate group of microorganisms.

How influenza is spread

Influenza viruses are spread through droplets produced by coughing or sneezing. Infected persons can spread the virus 1 day before feeling sick and for 5-10 days after symptoms begin. Young children may be contagious even longer.

To prevent spread of influenza, encourage students to wash their hands frequently with either soap and water or an alcohol-based hand gel, cough into their arm or elbow (hands spread germs), sneeze into tissues, and avoid touching their eyes and mouth. Clean commonly used surfaces such as desks and doorknobs often with disinfectants EPA-approved for effectiveness against Influenza A (on label). Ill students and teachers should remain out of school until fever has been absent for at least 24 hours.

Treatment

Keep hydrated with plenty of fluids and allow yourself to rest. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) can provide symptomatic relief from fever and muscle aches. Antiviral medications, prescribed by your doctor, may reduce the severity of symptoms and shorten recovery time. Antibiotics do not work against the flu.

The flu vaccine

The flu shot contains an inactivated (killed) form of the virus, which cannot cause infection. A nasal spray containing a weakened form of the live virus is also available. In addition to preventing influenza, flu vaccine can reduce the risk of flu complications including pneumonias and ear infections. Seasonal flu vaccine is made each year to include the influenza viruses predicted to be most common in the upcoming season. It is possible to get the flu even if you have been vaccinated. Other microorganisms may also cause flu-like symptoms.

Flu Prevention Tips

Get Immunized

Seasonal flu vaccine is recommended for all persons over 6 months of age, unless advised against by your physician. It is highly recommended for contacts of young children.

Cover your cough

Encourage students to cough into their elbow and sneeze into a tissue. Coughing and sneezing spread germs.

Wash your hands often

Hand hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of infection. Encourage your students to cleanse their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand gel often, particularly after coughing, sneezing, playing, and before handling food.

Stay home when sick

Ill persons should stay home until fever has been absent for 24 hours.

