



Health Alert Network Message 18-01: Flu Message to Schools and Daycares

Origination Date:

January 18, 2018

Revision Dates (list all revision dates):

We are writing to share an important update about the current flu season impacting our state. As you may already know, we are seeing widespread and early flu activity. In more severe seasons, the flu causes approximately 700 deaths and nearly 8,000 hospitalizations each year in Louisiana and we are already on track to meet and possibly exceed these statistics for the 2017/18 flu season.

This guidance is for school superintendents, school and day care administrators, teachers, parents, and students while influenza is increased in Louisiana. Review your infection control policies. The recommendations below follow the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance to reduce the spread of the flu, which can easily be passed from person to person in school and day care settings.

Healthy students and staff can report to school, as long as they are not sick and do not have flu-like symptoms. Teachers and students can safely attend classes if children and staff with flu-like symptoms are staying home. Schools and day cares need to exclude any child that becomes sick during the day, and should isolate sick students and staff away from others until sick students and staff leave the school. Sick students and teachers should stay away from school until they have been fever-free for 24 hours without the assistance of fever-reducing medicines. This will help prevent further spread in the school.

The symptoms of the flu include fever (over 100 degrees F.), cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. For most people, the flu can easily be treated at home with bedrest, fever-reducing, and antiviral medicines. However, people who have underlying medical conditions, women who are pregnant, or very young children should contact their doctor if they develop flu symptoms to see if they need further interventions or medications.

Germs are usually spread when a person breathes in respiratory droplets from someone who is sick. Droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air for a short distance (3 feet). Germs can also be spread when a person touches something that is contaminated from another person such as a desk or doorknob, and then touches his or her own eyes, mouth or nose before washing hands.

To reduce the risk of getting any illness, please do the following:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you have cold symptoms or have fever greater than 100.3. Stay away from others until you have not had a fever for 24 hours.
- Call your doctor immediately to see if an antiviral medication is appropriate for you.
- If you are sick, do not visit vulnerable loved ones who may be receiving care in a hospital, nursing home, cancer center or other setting.
- If you are sick, do not kiss babies, pregnant women, grandparents, and others who may be at a higher risk of getting sick.

- Cover your cough and sneeze.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Wash your hands frequently.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu.
- It's not too late to get a flu shot.

If you suspect a child has the flu, it is important that he/she does not attend school or go anywhere else – such as group childcare, the mall, or sporting events – where other people would be exposed to their flu germs.

It is also important to teach children how to reduce their risk of getting the flu and protect others from infection.

- Teach children to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of their elbow. Cough or sneeze into your sleeve – not your hands.

- Teach children to wash their hands often. Washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds is ideal (that's about as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice).

- Teach children the proper use of hand sanitizer (if they are too young, they should not use hand sanitizers on their own. Keep hand sanitizers away from young children). Gels, rubs, and hand wipes all work well, as long as they contain at least 60 percent alcohol. Hand wipes must be disposed of properly. Always read and follow label instructions when using hand sanitizer.

- Teach children to keep their hands away from their face and avoid touching their mouth, nose or eyes.

- Help children to learn these healthy habits by setting a good example and always doing them yourself.

If we all practice good hygiene we can limit the spread of flu in our schools and our communities at this time. If you suspect an influenza outbreak in your school or daycare, please immediately contact the Louisiana Office of Public Health Infectious Disease Epidemiology Hotline at 800-256-2748.