

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,

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Influenza Fact Sheet

What is influenza?

Influenza is commonly referred to as "the flu." It is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that affect the nose, throat, and lungs. There are two main types of influenza virus: A and B. Each type includes many different strains that tend to change from year to year.

When does influenza occur?

In the United States, influenza occurs most often in the late fall and winter months.

Who gets influenza?

Anyone can get influenza, but it is more likely to cause serious illness in young children, pregnant women, older persons, people with chronic illnesses (e.g., lung disease, heart disease, cancer, or diabetes) or those with weakened immune systems.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza spreads mainly by droplets from the nose or throat that are released when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Influenza can spread from one person to another beginning about one day before symptoms start through about a week after onset.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Influenza symptoms can include a sudden onset of fever, headache, chills, cough, sore throat, and body aches. In children, vomiting and diarrhea might occur. Although most people are ill for less than a week, some people have complications and may need to be hospitalized.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear one to three days after exposure.

How is influenza diagnosed?

Doctors usually diagnose influenza based on symptoms and may use laboratory tests for influenza.

What is the treatment for influenza?

Rest, liquids, and over-the-counter medicines for fever and discomfort are the usual treatments. Prescription antiviral drugs are available and may reduce the severity of influenza. Aspirin should not be given to children with fever-causing illnesses because of the possibility of a complication called Reye's syndrome.

How can influenza be prevented?

You can take three important steps to fight the flu:

- 1) Get vaccinated.
- 2) Stop the spread of flu and other germs by covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, washing your hands often to help protect yourself from germs, avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth, staying home from work, school, and other activities when you are sick, and avoiding close contact with people who are sick.

- 3) Use antiviral drugs if your doctor recommends them.

Who should be vaccinated against influenza?

All persons aged six months or older should be vaccinated against influenza each year. Particular effort should be made to immunize people at higher risk for influenza infection or complications, including:

- Pregnant and postpartum women, or those who will be pregnant during the influenza season
- Persons over 65 years of age, including residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- People who have chronic lung or heart problems, including asthma
- People who have other serious medical conditions, such as diabetes, kidney disease, cystic fibrosis, anemia, cancer, weak immune systems (including those with HIV), or a seizure disorder

To help prevent the spread of influenza to people in high-risk groups, those who live with people in a high-risk group and healthcare workers who provide care to high-risk patients should also receive an annual influenza vaccine. Travelers to countries outside of the U.S. may also need to consider influenza vaccination.

If I was vaccinated last year do I need a new flu vaccine this year?

Yes. It is important to receive a new flu vaccine every year. The formula for the vaccine can change from year to year, based on what strains of influenza virus are circulating. Also, protection offered by the influenza vaccine typically only lasts for several months. It is important that you receive a new vaccine every year.

Should I be worried about contact with animals?

Influenza viruses are not usually transmitted from animals to humans.

Birds, including wild birds and domesticated ducks, chickens and turkeys can become infected with influenza A viruses. Most of the avian (bird) influenza A viruses do not cause infection in humans. However, some avian influenza viruses can be transmitted to humans and can cause severe illness. Additional information on avian influenza is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/>.

Some influenza A viruses can cause illness in pigs—these viruses are called “swine flu viruses”. While swine flu viruses do not normally infect humans, a small number of swine influenza virus infections occur in humans each year. Most human cases of swine influenza infections have occurred in people who have had contact with swine on farms or at fairs or other livestock shows. Additional information on swine influenza may be found at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu/>.

Dogs can become infected with an influenza A (H3N8) virus. This influenza virus can be transmitted from dog to dog, but does not cause illness in humans. More information on canine influenza may be found at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/canine/>.

How can I get more information about influenza?

- If you have concerns about influenza, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD/index.htm>.
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>) or the Virginia Department of Health website at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/flu>.

Norovirus Disease

What is norovirus?

Norovirus is a very contagious virus that causes the "stomach flu," or vomiting and diarrhea, in people.

Who gets norovirus disease?

Anyone can be infected with norovirus and get sick. Because there are many different strains of norovirus, people who have been sick with norovirus can get it again throughout their lifetime.

How is norovirus spread?

The virus is found in the stool and vomit of infected people and can spread easily from person to person. People infected with norovirus are most contagious from the time they first start feeling ill through three days after they feel well again. People sometimes remain contagious for up to a month after they have recovered. People can become infected by eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated by infected food handlers, touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus and then touching their mouth before hand washing, or having direct contact with another person who is infected and then touching their mouth before hand washing. Therefore, good hand washing is the key to preventing the spread of norovirus.

What are the symptoms of norovirus disease?

Symptoms usually include nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea, and stomach cramping. Sometimes people have a low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Norovirus disease usually begins 12-48 hours after exposure, but can appear as early as 10 hours after exposure. The illness is usually brief, with symptoms lasting one to three days.

How is norovirus diagnosed?

Norovirus is usually diagnosed based on the patient's symptoms. In outbreaks, public health laboratories might conduct special tests on some ill persons to confirm the cause of the outbreak.

What is the treatment for norovirus disease?

Currently, there is no specific medication or vaccine for norovirus disease, and it cannot be treated with antibiotics. Drinking plenty of liquids, such as juice or water, is important to replace fluids and prevent dehydration. Mild dehydration can be treated with oral fluids obtained from a pharmacy. Persons who become severely dehydrated should seek medical care.

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How can norovirus be prevented?

Norovirus disease can be prevented in a number of ways, including:

- hand washing after using the restroom, changing diapers, sneezing, coughing, and before and after preparing food;
- disinfecting contaminated surfaces with household chlorine bleach-based cleaners;
- washing clothing and linens if they become soiled;
- washing fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating;
- avoiding food or water from sources that may be contaminated;
- cooking seafood completely.

Persons infected with norovirus should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for at least two days after they recover.

How can I get more information about norovirus?

- 1) If you have concerns about norovirus, contact your healthcare provider.
- 2) Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD/index.htm>.
- 3) Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/index.html>.