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Guidance for identifying, reporting, preventing, and controlling influenza outbreaks in schools, 2022-2023 influenza season

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Purpose

These guidelines are intended to help school personnel identify, report, control, and prevent suspected influenza outbreaks.

Criteria for Reporting Suspected Influenza Outbreaks

Monitoring for absenteeism and parent reports of influenza in students and staff can help identify potential outbreaks. Immediately notify the regional health department when:

1. Two or more individuals who test positive for influenza are reported in a group/ cohort or shared setting (e.g., classroom or shared room) within 72 hours of each other (i.e., individual is reported to have tested positive for influenza by a lab test such as a rapid influenza test, culture, real-time PCR, DFA, or IFA).

OR

2. *20% or more of students are absent or sent home on a given day in a group/cohort or shared setting (i.e., a classroom, sports team, or other epidemiologically linked group) attributed to influenza (e.g., in a group with 20 students contact DHEC when at least four students were absent or sent home with reported influenza).

* For shared settings with more than 5 students/staff total.

Please note: Initial reporting of the outbreak is all that is required; reporting on subsequent days of the same outbreak is not required. However, during an outbreak, if an unusual or atypical situation arises (e.g., severe morbidity, multiple hospitalizations), please contact the regional health department. Outbreaks should be considered over when influenza absenteeism numbers within the school decrease to a percentage below the criteria listed above or no new influenza cases have been reported for five consecutive school days. Report a new outbreak if your school meets the above listed criteria again during the influenza season and a minimum of five days has passed.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, determining if someone has COVID-19 or influenza will be difficult based on symptoms alone. Therefore, if multiple individuals (students or staff) are noted to have similar symptoms of influenza-like illness (ILI) or other symptoms related to influenza or COVID-19, testing is recommended for these individuals to determine if influenza or COVID-19 are causing their illness.

What to Report

Report as much of the following information, as available, when notifying the regional health department (use the reporting worksheet listed below as a guide):

- School Name
- Number of students/staff absent or sent home
- Number of students/staff known to have tested positive for influenza
- Baseline/typical absenteeism per day
- Earliest illness onset date and latest illness onset date
- Total school enrollment (students and staff)
- Total number in group/cohort, if applicable




How to Report

Fax the Reporting Worksheet for Suspected Influenza Outbreaks in Schools to your regional health department. Contact information can be found at:

www.scdhec.gov/sites/default/files/Library/CR-009025.pdf

Special Circumstances

In the event that a novel influenza strain emerges or significant morbidity and mortality are reported in individuals with positive influenza test results, schools may be required to report absenteeism rates and/or complete a line list.

Completed 	Recommendations for Prevention and Control	Resources
Vaccination		
	<p>Encourage the annual influenza vaccine to all students and staff, unless they cannot receive it for medical reasons.</p>	<p>cdc.gov/flu/protect/children.htm</p>
Good Hygiene Etiquette		
	<p>Reinforce opportunities for students and staff to engage in hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handwashing should occur upon reentering the building from recess, after handling trash, before eating, after coughing and sneezing, and after using the bathroom. • Students and staff should cover their nose and mouth with a tissue or their upper sleeve when coughing or sneezing. Place tissue in a trash bin after use and wash hands. • Provide adequate supplies for hand washing and hygiene. • Currently, face masks/coverings are highly recommended for students and staff to wear to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. 	<p>cdc.gov/handwashing/</p> <p>www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iFEvkbaFh4</p> <p>cdc.gov/flu/pdf/protect/cdc_cough.pdf</p>

Limit Contact with Others When Sick



Avoid close contact (i.e., within six feet) with ill persons.

scdhec.gov/health/child-teen-health/school-exclusion



Ensure staff and students with influenza or ILI are appropriately excluded from school. Follow the guidance outlined in the School and Childcare Exclusion List.*



Ensure procedures are in place to monitor reports of illness in students and staff.

Clean and Disinfect Surfaces



Follow your facility's policies for cleaning and disinfecting. In particular, ensure that frequently touched surfaces such as door knobs, tables, desks, computer keyboards, handrails, etc., are routinely cleaned.

cdc.gov/flu/school/cleaning.htm

cdc.gov/flu/school/

*Because the symptoms of influenza can be similar to those of COVID-19, DHEC encourages ill persons to get tested for COVID-19 and influenza. Ill persons with influenza-like illness (ILI) without a known cause and who also have symptoms of COVID-19 that would require exclusion from school (e.g., shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell, new or worsening cough), may need to be excluded until they have a negative PCR test for COVID-19 or it's been 10 days after the start of symptoms provided their symptoms have improved and the person has not had a fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications. For more information, please see the DHEC School Exclusion List at: scdhec.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/School-Childcare-Exclusion-List-2021_rev_8.24.21.pdf