

Washington County Public Schools

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February 5, 2020

Dear Parent/Caregiver and WCPS Colleagues:

As you are aware, influenza season has arrived in the area. We have been notified that a number of children have become sick with influenza or influenza-like illnesses in the Washington County Public Schools. We want you to know the steps you can take to prevent and control this disease as well as action steps taken in the schools.

Influenza, or the flu, is a contagious respiratory disease caused by influenza viruses that can cause mild to severe illness. Flu viruses usually spread from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Sometimes people might become infected by touching something, such as a surface or object, with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

We recommend the following measures to prevent the spread of influenza in the school:

- **Encourage good hygienic practices**
 - Wash hands with soap and water often, especially after being around someone sick.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when coughing or sneezing or use your upper sleeve, 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 **and disinfect** commonly touched surfaces, toys, etc. as recommended.
- **Reduce the spread of illness**
 - Individuals should stay home from school, work, and errands when sick.
 - Students or staff who are sick should remain home until they are fever-free for a full 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
 - Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- **Talk to your healthcare provider about flu vaccination**
 - The single best way to protect you and your family against flu is to get vaccinated. All persons aged 6 months and older are recommended to get vaccinated each year.
 - Flu vaccination is usually 40%-60% effective in preventing the flu in healthy persons. Even if some people who are vaccinated get the flu, vaccination can still offer some protection by reducing the severity or duration of illness.

- Ideally, people should get a flu vaccine before flu viruses begin spreading in their area. This is because it takes about two weeks after vaccination to develop protection against the flu. Receiving flu vaccine later in the season can still provide important protection because flu viruses can continue to circulate as late as May.
- **Antiviral medications**
 - These can be used to treat or prevent the flu. Talk with your healthcare provider to get more information.
- **Enhance influenza awareness**
 - Please see the enclosed fact sheet on influenza.

If you have any questions, please contact your child's doctor or the Washington County Health Department at (276) 676-5604.

As in previous years and especially during flu season, we consult and accept guidance and direction from the Virginia Department of Public Health Mount Rogers Health District for action steps in doing our part in minimizing the spread of flu among our school community population.

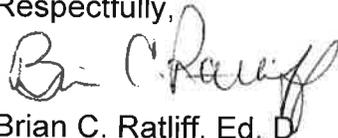
Our school nursing professionals are tracking the number of flu cases and associated flu-like illnesses and reporting information on a daily basis. The Washington County Health Department is our best source for reliable and accurate information on the flu outbreak and we are in regular communication with them.

On a routine basis, our custodians and other colleagues are providing intensified cleaning efforts multiple times during the school day and in the evenings and/or on the weekends when school is not in session. Furthermore, we are cleaning surfaces with effective disinfecting solutions in our facilities and also on our buses.

Please know we are working closely and diligently with Public Health Department professionals and others to help maintain a safe and healthy environment for our children and colleagues while they are in our schools and facilities.

We are including an enclosure with reliable information on the seasonal flu which is helpful to our entire school community.

Respectfully,



Brian C. Ratliff, Ed. D
Division Superintendent



HEALTHY TIPS FOR 2020

Make an appointment for a check-up, vaccination, or screening. Regular oral and medical exams and tests can help find problems before they start. They also help find problems early, when your chances for treatment and cure are better.

Wash your hands often with soap and water to prevent the spread of infection and illness. Hand washing involves five simple steps—**Wet, Lather, Scrub, Rinse, Dry.** Regular handwashing, particularly before and after certain activities, can reduce the rate of infection by 16% and is one of the best ways to remove germs, avoid getting sick, and prevent the spread of germs to others.

Make healthy food choices. A healthy eating plan emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products. It also includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts, and is low in saturated fats.

Get Active. Start small—Help your child find an age appropriate sport they enjoy and get the entire family involved. The more they enjoy the activity, the more likely they will continue it.

Get enough sleep. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that:

- preschoolers 3-5 years of age get 10 to 13 hours of sleep,
- grade-schoolers 6 to 12 years of age get 9 to 12 hours of sleep, and
- teens 13 to 18 years of age get 8 to 10 hours of sleep every 24 hours.

Children who get enough sleep have a healthier immune system, and better school performance, behavior, memory, and mental health.

Flu vs Cold

As of Jan. 25, 2020, the Virginia Department of Health surveillance activity is showing the cases of influenza are wide spread across the state this season. The flu usually comes on suddenly. People who have the flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

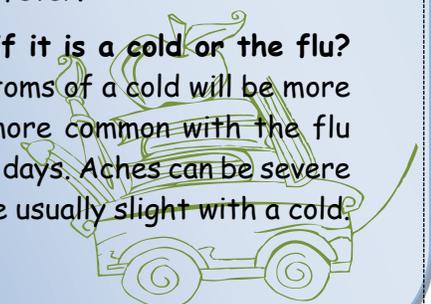
- Fever* or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)

Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

* It is important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.

How do you know if it is a cold or the flu?

The onset of symptoms of a cold will be more gradual. Fever is more common with the flu and can last up to 3 days. Aches can be severe with the flu and are usually slight with a cold.



EVERYDAY FLU PREVENTIVE ACTIONS

Annual seasonal influenza vaccination remains the most effective means of protection against contracting influenza illness and preventing spread of the disease. Seasonal flu vaccine may be given to children 6 months of age and older each year.

Please Remember:

People infected with flu may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5-7 days after becoming sick.

Healthy Habits to Prevent Flu

▪ **Avoid close contact.**

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.

▪ **Stay home when you are sick.**

If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. This will help prevent spreading your illness to others.

▪ **Cover your mouth and nose.**

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Flu and other serious respiratory illnesses is spread by cough, sneezing, or unclean hands.

▪ **Clean your hands.**

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

▪ **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.**

Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.

▪ **Practice other good health habits.**

Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work or school, especially when someone is ill. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.



The Washington County School Nurses

Abingdon Elementary School

Melissa Cleary (276) 739-3402

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Paula Nichols (276) 739-3239

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Robin Smith (276) 739-3308

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Dawn Robinson (276) 739-3804

Greendale Elementary School

Ruth Ann Baily (276) 739-3503

Highpoint Elementary School

Lynn Redman (276) 642-5602

Holston High School

Sandra Richardson (276) 739-4021

John Battle High School

Brenda Jones (276) 642-5332

Meadowview Elementary School

Katherine Holloway (276) 739-3907

Patrick Henry High School

Stephanie Mullins (276) 739-3704

Rhea Valley Elementary School

Kim Fuller (276) 739-4203

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Talena Leonard (276) 642-5403

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Washington County Public Schools Head Nurse

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Thank you



What is influenza?

Influenza is commonly referred to as “the flu.” It is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Flu can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. There are two main types of flu viruses: Type A and B. Each type includes many different strains that tend to change from year to year. Flu viruses can be detected year-round in the United States, but they are most common during the fall and winter.

Who gets flu?

Anyone can get flu, but it is more likely to cause serious illness in young children, pregnant women, people aged 65 years and older, residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, and people with chronic illnesses (e.g., lung disease, heart disease, cancer, or diabetes) or weakened immune systems.

How is flu spread?

Flu spreads mainly by droplets from the nose or throat that are released when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might get flu by touching a surface or object that has the flu virus on it and then touching his or her mouth, nose, or eyes. Flu can spread from one person to another beginning about one day before symptoms start and up to five to seven days after becoming sick.

What are the symptoms of flu?

Flu symptoms can include a sudden onset of fever, headache, chills, cough, sore throat, fatigue, and muscle or body aches. In children, vomiting and diarrhea might occur. Most people with flu recover within a few days to less than two weeks. Some people might develop severe or even life-threatening complications, such as pneumonia.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear 1–4 days after exposure.

How is flu diagnosed?

Doctors usually diagnose flu based on symptoms and they might use laboratory tests for influenza. Many doctors might not test for flu because the test results usually do not change how you are treated.

What is the treatment for flu?

Rest, liquids, and over-the-counter medicines for fever and discomfort are the usual treatments. Prescription antiviral drugs are available and can 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. Antibiotics are not used to treat flu.

How can flu be prevented?

You can take three important steps to fight the flu:

1. Get vaccinated every year.
2. Stop the spread of flu and other germs.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
 - Wash your hands often to help protect yourself from germs.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
 - Stay home from work, school, and other activities when you are sick.
 - Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
 - Clean surfaces and objects that might be contaminated with germs.
3. Take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them.

Who should be vaccinated against flu?

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

- Pregnant and postpartum women, or those who will be pregnant during the flu 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 flu 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 be vaccinated. Travelers to countries outside the United States might also need to consider flu 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 flu virus are circulating. Also, protection offered by the flu vaccine typically only lasts for several months.

Should I be worried about contact with animals?

Flu viruses are not usually transmitted from animals to humans.

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

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

Dogs can become infected with canine (dog) flu A viruses (H3N8 and H3N2). These dog flu viruses can be transmitted from dog to dog, but they do not cause illness in humans. More information on canine flu is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/canineflu/>.

How can I get more information about flu?

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

September 2018