

August 20, 2009

Frequently Asked Questions about the Flu

Q. Which students and staff are at higher risk for complications from flu?

- Children under the age of 5 years, pregnant women, people of any age with chronic medical conditions (such as pulmonary disease, including asthma, diabetes, neuromuscular disorders or heart disease), and people age 65 years and older are more likely to get complications from the flu.

Q. What can families, students, and school personnel do?

- Wash your Hands. Students and staff members should wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Cover you Cough. The main way that the flu spreads is from person to person in the droplets produced by coughs and sneezes, so it's important to cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow or shoulder, not into your hands.
- Staying home if you're sick. Keeping sick students at home means that they keep their viruses to themselves rather than sharing them with others.

Q. What is the best way to wash your hands?

- Washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (the time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice).
- Alcohol-based hand cleaners containing at least 60% alcohol are also effective.

Q. What steps can schools take to keep students and staff from getting sick?

- Clean surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact with cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas. Additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is not recommended.
- Move students and staff who become sick at school to a separate room until they can be sent home. Limit the number of staff who take care of the sick person and provide a surgical mask for the sick person to wear if they can tolerate it.

Q. What should I do if I'm pregnant and I work or attend a K-12 school?

- Pregnant women working in or attending schools should follow the same guidance as the general public about staying home when sick, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and routine cleaning.

Q. What are fever-reducing medications and when would I stop giving them to my child?

- Fever-reducing medications are medicines that contain acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen (such as Motrin). These medicines can be given to people who are sick with flu to help bring their fever down and relieve their pain. Aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) **should not** be given to children or teenagers who have flu; this can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome.
- A sick student can return to school after 24 hours have passed with a normal temperature without the use of fever-reducing medications.

Q. Can the virus live on surfaces, such as computer keyboards?

- Yes, flu viruses may be spread when a person touches droplets left by coughs and sneezes on hard surfaces (such as desks or door knobs) or objects (such as keyboards or pens) and then touches his or her mouth or nose. However, it is not necessary to disinfect these surfaces beyond routine cleaning.

Q. How long should a sick student or staff member be kept home?

- In the current flu conditions, students and staff with symptoms of flu should stay home for at least 24 hours *after* they no longer have fever or do not feel feverish, without using fever-reducing drugs.

Q. What can a parent do to prepare for flu during the 2009-2010 school year?

- Plan for child care at home if your child gets sick or their school is dismissed.
- Plan to monitor the health of the sick child and any other children by checking for fever and other symptoms of flu.
- Update emergency contact lists.
- Identify a separate room in the house for care of sick family members. Consider designating a single person as the main caregiver for anyone who gets sick.
- Pull together games, books, DVDs and other items to keep your family entertained while at home.
- Get your family vaccinated for seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu when vaccines are available.