

the flu

Information for Schools on the Flu

What is influenza or “the flu”?

The flu is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs. It is spread easily by coughing, sneezing or talking. Most people are sick for about a week and then feel better. Unfortunately, people can get very sick from the flu and some people may die. This fall, an additional flu virus - the novel H1N1 (swine) flu virus - is expected to spread.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

People with the flu develop a high fever, headache, dry cough, sore throat and aching muscles very quickly. Children may have stomach problems such as diarrhea and vomiting. Some people with the flu have NO symptoms at all and can still spread flu to others.

How can I protect my child from the flu?

Flu vaccine is the single best way to protect against the flu. There will be two different flu vaccines available this fall. It is important to make sure children (and some adults) get both kinds. Seasonal flu vaccine is or will be available soon. H1N1 2009 vaccine is expected to be available in the late fall. Seasonal flu vaccine will not protect against novel H1N1 flu. Protect your family by getting them vaccinated as soon as possible.

Why are children at high risk for the flu?

Children have the highest chance of getting sick from the flu and often spread the germs throughout their communities. This fall there is concern about both seasonal flu and H1N1 2009 flu. Because children do not have immunity to novel H1N1 virus, they have been most affected by it and are considered at high risk of infection. As the U.S. begins its fall and winter flu season, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is concerned that the novel H1N1 virus may cause more illness, which may be severe in some cases.

What can the school do to protect students?

School personnel and faculty should get vaccinated against seasonal influenza and encourage others in contact with children - parents, siblings, teachers, secretaries and other support staff - to get vaccinated against seasonal flu as well. Getting vaccinated is especially important for those who take care of infants younger than 6 months of age. These babies are too young to be given flu vaccine.

What are some everyday precautions I can take?

Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread easily this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- While sick, stay home and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

What should the school do if a student gets the flu?

If a student or teacher gets the flu, CDC recommends that they stay home from work or school and not go out into the community, unless to seek care from a medical provider, until they are fever-free for 24 hours. It is very important to keep kids home when they are sick.

Is flu vaccine recommended for children in schools?

Yes. CDC and the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) recommend that children 6 months of age and older receive seasonal flu vaccine to help them stay healthy. All children 6 months through 18 years of age are recommended to receive seasonal flu vaccine each and every year. H1N1 2009 flu vaccine is also recommended for school-aged children.

Are flu vaccines safe?

Yes, flu vaccines are very safe. It is important to understand that the chance of being harmed from this disease is much greater than any chance of being harmed from vaccination.

Are there side effects from the flu vaccines?

Most adults and children have little or no problems after receiving flu vaccine. There may be soreness or redness where the shot was given. The nasal flu vaccine can sometimes cause a stuffy nose.

Where can I get more information?

Contact your health care provider or local health department and visit the following websites frequently:

- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention • www.cdc.gov/flu
- Michigan Dept of Community Health • www.michigan.gov/flu
- Department of Health & Human Services • www.flu.gov
- Childhood Influenza Coalition • www.preventchildhoodinfluenza.org
- Families Fighting Flu • www.familiesfightingflu.org