

# CDC Information

## **Information for Schools About the Flu (Excerpted from [www.CDC.gov](http://www.CDC.gov))**

Schools are instrumental in keeping their communities healthy by taking actions such as posting information about hand hygiene in restrooms, providing flu prevention messages in daily announcements, and being vigilant about cleaning and disinfecting classroom materials.

The following are answers to questions commonly asked by school administrators, teachers, staff, and parents:

### **What is influenza (flu)?**

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), are at high risk for serious flu complications. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each year.

### **How does the flu spread?**

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or possibly their nose.

### **What are the symptoms of the flu?**

Symptoms of flu include:

- fever (usually high)
- headache
- extreme tiredness
- dry cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults

### **How long is a person with flu virus contagious?**

The period when an infected person is contagious depends on the age and health of the person. You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others for an even longer time.

### **What is the difference between a cold and the flu?**

The flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses but they are caused by different viruses. Because these two types of illnesses have similar symptoms, it can be difficult to tell the difference

between them based on symptoms alone. In general, the flu is worse than the common cold, and symptoms such as fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and dry cough are more common and intense. Colds are usually milder than the flu. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose. Colds generally do not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations. Special tests that usually must be done within the first few days of illness can be carried out, when needed to tell if a person has the flu.

#### **What can I do to protect myself against the flu?**

CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting against this serious disease. While there are many different flu viruses, the flu vaccine protects against the main flu viruses that research indicates will cause the most illness during the flu season. (Three or four viruses, depending on which vaccine you get.) The vaccine can protect you from getting sick from these viruses or it can make your illness milder if you get a different flu virus.

In addition, you should take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs, like flu. This includes staying away from sick people, frequent hand washing, and cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, especially if someone is ill, to decrease your chances of getting or spreading the flu. If you are sick with flu, reduce your contact with others and cover your cough to help keep germs from spreading.

#### **How do flu vaccines work?**

Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body. These antibodies provide protection against infection with the viruses that are in the vaccine. The seasonal flu vaccine protects against the main influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season. About 2 weeks after vaccination, antibodies that provide protection against influenza virus infection develop in the body.

#### **At what age should a child be vaccinated?**

CDC recommends that everyone aged 6 months and older get a flu vaccine. Children younger than 6 months are too young to get vaccinated. It's especially important that their contacts be vaccinated to protect them from possible exposure to the flu.

#### **What are influenza antiviral drugs?**

Influenza antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. Antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They also may also prevent serious flu complications. This could be especially important for people at high risk of flu complications. Antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms).

## **How To Clean and Disinfect Schools To Help Slow the Spread of Flu**

Cleaning and disinfecting are part of a broad approach to preventing infectious diseases in schools. To help slow the spread of influenza (flu), the first line of defense is getting vaccinated. Other measures include staying home when sick, covering coughs and sneezes, and washing hands often. Below are tips on how to slow the spread of flu specifically through cleaning and disinfecting.

### **1. Know the difference between cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing**

**Cleaning removes germs**, dirt, and impurities from surfaces or objects. Cleaning works by using soap (or detergent) and water to physically remove germs from surfaces. This process does not necessarily kill germs, but by removing them, it lowers their numbers and the risk of spreading infection.

**Disinfecting kills germs** on surfaces or objects. Disinfecting works by using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces or objects. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs, but by killing germs on a surface after cleaning, it can further lower the risk of spreading infection.

**Sanitizing lowers the number of germs** on surfaces or objects to a safe level, as judged by public health standards or requirements. This process **works by either cleaning or disinfecting** surfaces or objects to lower the risk of spreading infection.

### **2. Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are touched often**

Follow your school's standard procedures for routine cleaning and disinfecting. Typically, this means daily sanitizing surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones, and toys. Some schools may also require daily disinfecting these items. Standard procedures often call for disinfecting specific areas of the school, like bathrooms.

Immediately clean surfaces and objects that are visibly soiled. If surfaces or objects are soiled with body fluids or blood, use gloves and other standard precautions to avoid coming into contact with the fluid. Remove the spill, and then clean and disinfect the surface.

### **3. Simply do routine cleaning and disinfecting**

It is important to match your cleaning and disinfecting activities to the types of germs you want to remove or kill. Most studies have shown that the flu virus can live and potentially infect a person for up to 48 hours after being deposited on a surface. However, it is not necessary to close schools to clean or disinfect every surface in the building to slow the spread of flu. Also, if students and staff are dismissed because the school cannot function normally (e.g., high absenteeism during a flu outbreak), it is not necessary to do extra cleaning and disinfecting.

Flu viruses are relatively fragile, so standard cleaning and disinfecting practices are sufficient to remove or kill them. Special cleaning and disinfecting processes, including wiping down walls and ceilings, frequently using room air deodorizers, and fumigating, are not necessary or recommended. These

processes can irritate eyes, noses, throats, and skin; aggravate asthma; and cause other serious side effects.

#### **4. Clean and disinfect correctly**

Always follow label directions on cleaning products and disinfectants. Wash surfaces with a general household cleaner to remove germs. Rinse with water, and follow with an EPA-registered disinfectant to kill germs. Read the label to make sure it states that EPA has approved the product for effectiveness against influenza A virus.

If a surface is not visibly dirty, you can clean it with an EPA-registered product that both cleans (removes germs) and disinfects (kills germs) instead. Be sure to read the label directions carefully, as there may be a separate procedure for using the product as a cleaner or as a disinfectant. Disinfection usually requires the product to remain on the surface for a certain period of time (e.g., letting it stand for 3 to 5 minutes).

Use disinfecting wipes on electronic items that are touched often, such as phones and computers. Pay close attention to the directions for using disinfecting wipes. It may be necessary to use more than one wipe to keep the surface wet for the stated length of contact time. Make sure that the electronics can withstand the use of liquids for cleaning and disinfecting.

#### **5. Use products safely**

Pay close attention to hazard warnings and directions on product labels. Cleaning products and disinfectants often call for the use of gloves or eye protection. For example, gloves should always be worn to protect your hands when working with bleach solutions.

Do not mix cleaners and disinfectants unless the labels indicate it is safe to do so. Combining certain products (such as chlorine bleach and ammonia cleaners) can result in serious injury or death.

Ensure that custodial staff, teachers, and others who use cleaners and disinfectants read and understand all instruction labels and understand safe and appropriate use. This might require that instructional materials and training be provided in other languages.

#### **6. Handle waste properly**

Follow your school's standard procedures for handling waste, which may include wearing gloves. Place no-touch waste baskets where they are easy to use. Throw disposable items used to clean surfaces and items in the trash immediately after use. Avoid touching used tissues and other waste when emptying waste baskets. Wash your hands with soap and water after emptying waste baskets and touching used

#### **Where can I get more information about the flu?**

For more information and updates about the flu, you can visit [CDC's flu Web site](http://www.cdc.gov/flu) or <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/influenza/index.html>