

Influenza Is on the Rise

Dear Parents and Guardians:

We are experiencing an increase of influenza and influenza (“flu”) like respiratory illness across both our school division and the general community. Albemarle County Public Schools is working with the Thomas Jefferson Health District to take the appropriate steps to protect the health of our staff and students.

Symptoms of the flu include a fever with a cough, sore throat, and fatigue. The flu virus spreads easily through contact with droplets from the nose or throat of an infected individual. Exposure can occur by breathing in these droplets or by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your own mouth, nose, or eyes.

Because the flu is easily transmitted and can cause severe illness, we ask that you evaluate your child for respiratory illness and refrain from sending your child to school with a fever, cough or sore throat. Any child at school with a fever will be sent home. Your children should remain out of school until they have been without a fever for at least 24 continuous hours without the use of fever-reducing medication such as ibuprofen (Advil/Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol).

To reduce your family’s risk of becoming infected with the flu and other illnesses:

- Encourage good hand washing, particularly after using the restroom and before eating, by using warm water and soap and scrubbing for at least 20 seconds or by using liquid hand sanitizers when soap and water are not available.
- Teach your children to cough and sneeze into the inside of the elbow. Encourage respiratory etiquette by covering a cough or sneeze with a tissue. Germs can survive on hands and be passed to others when you touch shared objects like a doorknob or pencil.
- Encourage your children to avoid touching their mouth, nose or eyes, as the flu virus may enter the body this way.

It is not too late to get the flu vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a yearly flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting against the flu. Vaccination can reduce flu illnesses, visits to the doctor, and missed work and school due to flu, as well as prevent flu-related hospitalizations.

Plan now for your child’s care should you or your child become ill. While recovering, try to avoid contact with others as much as possible (limit shopping, public transportation, etc.) to help keep the virus from spreading. If symptoms worsen or cause you concern, contact your doctor or health care provider.

An influenza fact sheet from the Thomas Jefferson Health District is attached. If you have any concerns about your child’s health or illness, please contact your child’s physician. Please contact your school nurse if you have any additional questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Eileen Gomez
School Health Coordinator
Albemarle County Public Schools

La influenza está en aumento

Queridos Padres y Guardianes:

Estamos experimentando un aumento de la gripe y enfermedades respiratorias como de gripe en nuestra división escolar y la comunidad en general. Las Escuelas Públicas del Condado de Albemarle están trabajando con el Distrito de Salud de Thomas Jefferson para tomar las medidas apropiadas para proteger la salud de nuestro personal y estudiantes.

Los síntomas de la gripe incluyen fiebre con tos, dolor de garganta y fatiga. El virus de la gripe se propaga fácilmente a través del contacto con secreciones de la nariz o la garganta de una persona infectada. La exposición puede ocurrir al respirar estas secreciones o al tocar superficies contaminadas y luego tocarse la boca, la nariz o los ojos.

Debido a que la gripe se transmite fácilmente y puede causar una enfermedad grave, le pedimos que examine a su hijo para síntomas de enfermedad respiratoria y se abstenga de enviarlo a la escuela con fiebre, tos o dolor de garganta. Cualquier niño en la escuela con fiebre será enviado a casa. Sus hijos deben permanecer fuera de la escuela hasta que hayan estado sin fiebre durante al menos 24 horas continuas sin el uso de medicamentos antifebriles como el ibuprofeno (Advil/Motrin) o el acetaminofeno (Tylenol).

Para reducir el riesgo de que su familia se infecte con la gripe y otras enfermedades:

- Fomente un buen lavado de manos, particularmente después de usar el baño y antes de comer, usando agua tibia y jabón y frotando durante al menos 20 segundos o usando desinfectantes líquidos para manos cuando no haya agua y jabón disponibles.
- Enseñe a sus hijos a toser y estornudar dentro del codo. Fomente la etiqueta respiratoria cubriendo la tos o estornudos con un pañuelo de papel. Los gérmenes pueden sobrevivir en las manos y transmitirse a otros tocando objetos compartidos como un pomo o un lápiz.
- Anime a sus hijos a evitar tocarse la boca, la nariz o los ojos, ya que el virus de la gripe puede ingresar al cuerpo de esta manera.

No es demasiado tarde para vacunarse contra la gripe. Los Centros para el Control y la Prevención de Enfermedades (CDC) recomiendan una vacuna anual contra la gripe como el primer y más importante paso en la protección contra la gripe. La vacunación puede reducir las enfermedades de la gripe, las visitas al médico y días perdidos en el trabajo y la escuela debido a la gripe, así como prevenir las hospitalizaciones relacionadas con la gripe.

Planifique ahora para el cuidado de su hijo si usted o su hijo se enferman. Mientras se recupera, trate de evitar el contacto con los demás tanto como sea posible (limite las compras, el transporte público, etc.) para evitar que el virus se propague. Si los síntomas empeoran o le preocupan, comuníquese con su médico o proveedor de atención médica.

Se adjunta una hoja informativa sobre la influenza del Distrito de Salud de Thomas Jefferson. Si tiene alguna inquietud sobre la salud o enfermedad de su hijo, comuníquese con el médico de su hijo. Comuníquese con la enfermera de la escuela si tiene preguntas o inquietudes adicionales.

Sinceramente,

Eileen Gomez

Coordinador de Salud Escolar

Escuelas Públicas del Condado de Albemarle



INFLUENZA

What is influenza?

Influenza is commonly referred to as “the flu.” It is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that affect the nose, throat, and lungs. There are two main types of influenza virus: A and B. Each type includes many different strains that tend to change from year to year.

When does influenza occur?

In the United States, influenza occurs most often in the late fall and winter months.

Who gets influenza?

Anyone can get influenza, but it is more likely to cause serious illness in young children, pregnant women, older persons, people with chronic illnesses (e.g., lung disease, heart disease, cancer, or diabetes) or those with weakened immune systems.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza spreads mainly by droplets from the nose or throat that are released when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Influenza can spread from one person to another beginning about one day before symptoms start through about a week after onset.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Influenza symptoms can include a sudden onset of fever, headache, chills, cough, sore throat, and body aches. In children, vomiting and diarrhea might occur. Although most people are ill for less than a week, some people have complications and may need to be hospitalized.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear one to three days after exposure.

How is influenza diagnosed?

Doctors usually diagnose influenza based on symptoms and may use laboratory tests for influenza.

What is the treatment for influenza?

Rest, liquids, and over-the-counter medicines for fever and discomfort are the usual treatments. Prescription antiviral drugs are available and may 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.

How can influenza be prevented?

You can take three important steps to fight the flu:

1. Get vaccinated.
2. Stop the spread of flu and other germs by covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing; washing your hands often to help protect yourself from germs; avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth; staying home from work, school, and other activities when you are sick; and avoiding close contact with people who are sick.
3. Use antiviral drugs if your doctor recommends them.

Who should be vaccinated against influenza?

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

- Pregnant and postpartum women, or those who will be pregnant during the influenza 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 influenza 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 receive an annual influenza vaccine. Travelers to countries outside of the U.S. may also need to consider influenza 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 influenza virus are circulating. Also, protection offered by the influenza vaccine typically only lasts for several months. It is important that you receive a new vaccine every year.

Should I be worried about contact with animals?

Influenza viruses are not usually transmitted from animals to humans.

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

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

Dogs can become infected with an influenza A (H3N8) virus. This influenza virus can be transmitted from dog to dog, but does not cause illness in humans. More information on canine influenza may be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/canineflu/keyfacts.htm>.

How can I get more information about influenza?

- If you have concerns about influenza, 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 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/>) or the Virginia Department of Health website at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/influenza-flu-in-virginia/>