



October 6, 2014

Dear School Administrators, Staff, Parents and Guardians:

We want your school community to be informed about the **flu** (influenza), **norovirus** (sometimes called stomach flu) and **enterovirus D68** in order to minimize illness and to keep kids healthy and in class. Washington County Public Health anticipates schools will see an increase in individuals (staff, students, etc.) ill with influenza and norovirus over the next several months, when these illnesses are more common. Cases of enterovirus D68 have been detected in multiple states, but none in Oregon at this time. State and local public health departments are monitoring the situation.

Please review this letter and contact your health care provider for more information on these illnesses. School districts follow Washington County Public Health and Oregon Health Authority school exclusion guidelines, which state that a child with influenza-like symptoms, fever, or unexplained vomiting or diarrhea should be excluded from school until 24 hours after their symptoms have resolved.

FLU (INFLUENZA)

Influenza spreads when someone with the illness coughs, sneezes or talks, and small droplets get into the nose or mouth of someone close by. Less often a person might get the flu by touching a surface that has flu virus on it and then touching his/her own mouth or nose.

Prevention:

Preventive measures are by far the best way to minimize spread of flu at school:

- **Get yourself and your child(ren) vaccinated if you have not yet had a flu shot this flu season.** Please contact your health care provider or go to flu.oregon.gov to search for the nearest location that offers the flu vaccine.
- **Stay home/keep sick kids home if sick.**
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- Wash hands often.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.

Symptoms of influenza usually start suddenly and include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Muscle aches and pains

The flu generally lasts 3-5 days, but can last up to two weeks. Consult your health care provider for symptoms that are severe or do not get better.

NOROVIRUS

Norovirus (stomach flu) spreads easily from person-to-person. Norovirus is found in stool and vomit. A person can get sick when the virus gets into his/her mouth. This usually happens by eating food or drinking liquids contaminated with norovirus, touching contaminated surfaces, or having contact with someone who is infected with norovirus.

Prevention:

Preventive measures are important in minimizing spread of norovirus in schools:

- The single best way to prevent getting norovirus is to **practice proper hand washing.**
- **Stay home/keep kids home if sick.**
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- There is no vaccine for norovirus.

Symptoms include:

- Diarrhea
- Nausea and vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Fever, headache, body aches

You can feel extremely ill and throw up or have diarrhea many times a day, lasting 1-2 days. This can cause dehydration, especially in young children. If they become dehydrated, children may cry with few or no tears and be unusually sleepy or fussy. Consult your health care provider for symptoms that are severe or do not get better.

ENTEROVIRUS D68

Enteroviruses are very common viruses, and there are more than 100 types. Enterovirus D68 (EV-D68) is not a new virus, but it is less common than other types of enteroviruses. Currently, no cases of EV-D68 have been reported in Oregon. State and local health departments are monitoring the situation.

EV-D68 can cause mild illness, but it can also cause serious respiratory symptoms. It can be particularly serious for children with asthma or other conditions that make breathing difficult. Children and adults who are having trouble breathing should seek medical care immediately.

Symptoms may include:

- Mild symptoms are similar to a cold and may include fever, runny nose, sneezing, cough, and body or muscle aches.
- Some illnesses can be severe with difficulty breathing and wheezing. Children with a history of asthma or wheezing seem to be at higher risk for severe respiratory illness.

Prevention:

EV-D68 appears to spread through contact with respiratory secretions (from coughs or sneezes) of infected people. There is no vaccine to prevent EV-D68 infections.

As with other respiratory illnesses, the best ways to reduce the risk of getting or spreading infection are to:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds. For enteroviruses, alcohol sanitizer is not a replacement for washing hands with soap and water.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If you don't have a tissue, cover your mouth with your sleeve.
- Stay at home from work, daycare or school when sick to avoid exposing others to infection.

Children and adults with asthma should be sure to have their asthma symptoms under control and discuss and update their asthma action plan with their primary care providers. They should see a healthcare provider if they develop a respiratory infection and their asthma symptoms worsen.

Lastly, now is a good time to review your family's immunization history and make sure all are up to date on vaccinations. Immunizations are one of the best ways to protect you and your children from a variety of diseases.

Sincerely,



Christina Baumann, MD, MPH
Interim Deputy Health Officer
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