



How teachers and other school staff can prevent the spread of influenza (flu) at school



Seasonal influenza 2020-2021

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Background

Schools play a critical role in protecting the health of their students, staff, and the community from contagious diseases, such as influenza, generally referred to as flu. We are now experiencing our annual flu season and both influenza A and B viruses are circulating in the community.

Be aware of the symptoms of flu

Flu usually presents with **rapid onset of fever** (temperature of 38°C/100°F or over) and cough or sore throat. Other symptoms can include runny or stuffy nose, limb or joint pains, headache, vomiting or diarrhoea.

Prevent the spread of flu by doing the following at all times:

1. Practice good [hand hygiene](#) by washing your hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Hand drying facilities at school must not be shared between people with the exception of electric hand dryers and roller towels (of the type that allows for a clean section to be pulled out for each use). Staff and students may be asked to bring in and use their own individual towels. If you do not have access to these facilities, use alcohol hand gel.
2. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of tissues immediately as household rubbish in the normal way. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow or shoulder, not into your hands. See [respiratory hygiene posters and social media resources](#) on the HPSC website.
3. If you have suspected flu, you should stay at home while you have symptoms, as you will be infectious to others, and until you are well enough to return usually 5 to 7 days from when symptoms began. You should not return to school if you have a fever i.e. temperature of 38°C/100°F or over.

4. If you are at higher risk for complications from flu, get the seasonal flu vaccine. See [HSE Flu information for people in at risk groups](#)

Teachers and other school staff should take the following steps ALL the time and not only during the flu season to help prevent students and themselves from getting sick with respiratory illnesses.

- Make sure posters and signage regarding flu, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette are appropriately displayed in the school (see links to posters below).
- Remind students to practice good hand hygiene and ensure that they have the time and facilities to wash their hands as often as necessary. Younger children and those with special needs may require extra attention.
- Be a good role model by practicing good hand hygiene and covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Do not permit children to share wind instruments. Avoid sharing pens, crayons, pencils, toys/objects where possible and if sharing them clean them before passing them between students. See Chapter 6 in Management of Infectious Diseases in Schools available at <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/lifestages/schoolhealth/>
- Ensure regular cleaning of surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact such as desks, door knobs and keyboards with usual cleaning agents. See Chapter 6 in Management of Infectious Diseases in Schools available at <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/lifestages/schoolhealth/>
- Keep an eye out for students with symptoms of flu and arrange for them to go home as soon as possible. If practicable they should be sent to another room while awaiting collection.
- Staff should also stay at home if they have symptoms of flu as they may be infectious to others.
- Persons who are in high risk groups for complications of flu (see below) and who develop flu symptoms should speak with their doctor, as people at high risk of complications can benefit from early treatment with antiviral medicines.

Who should receive the annual flu vaccine?

Persons who may be at higher risk for complications of flu should receive the annual flu vaccine and include:

- Those with chronic respiratory, heart, kidney, liver or neurological disease, immunosuppression (weakened immune system whether caused by disease or treatment), diabetes, haemoglobinopathies
- Children with any condition (e.g. cognitive dysfunction, spinal cord injury, seizure disorder or other neuromuscular disorder) that can compromise lung function, especially those attending special schools/day centres
- Children with moderate or severe neurodevelopmental disorders such as cerebral palsy and intellectual disability
- Those with Down Syndrome
- People aged 65 years and older
- People on medication for asthma

- Those who are severely obese (BMI \geq 40)
- Pregnant women at any stage for pregnancy

Anyone (aged 6 months and older) who wishes to reduce their risk of infection may choose to have the seasonal influenza vaccine, discuss with your GP.

Should schools close due to flu?

We do not recommend that schools should close to prevent the spread of flu. However, schools may choose to close if there are a large number of absences which impact the functioning of school. e.g. a large number of staff ill.

What handwashing facilities should I provide?

Regular handwashing should be encouraged. Liquid soap and warm running water should be available. You do not need to provide special antibacterial soap. Hand drying facilities should not be shared with the exception of a roller towel which allows for a clean section to be pulled down for each use and hand dryers. Students may be asked to bring in their own individual towels. If you do not have access to these facilities, use alcohol hand gel.

Further information

Posters: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/influenza/seasonalinfluenza/infectioncontroladvice/respiratoryhygieneposters/>:

Guidance on seasonal influenza:
<https://www.hpsc.ie/A-Z/Respiratory/Influenza/SeasonalInfluenza/>

Environmental Cleaning

See Chapter 6 in Management of Infectious Diseases in Schools available at <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/lifestages/schoolhealth/>

Contact details for HSE Departments of Public Health (and counties they cover)

HSE North West Tel 071-9852900 Donegal Leitrim Sligo	HSE Midlands Tel 057-9359891 Longford Westmeath Offaly Laois
HSE South Tel 021-4927601 Cork Kerry	HSE Mid West Tel 061-483337 Clare Limerick Tipperary North
HSE North East Tel 046-9076412 Cavan Monaghan Louth Meath	HSE South East Tel 056-7784142 Tipperary South Waterford Kilkenny Carlow Wexford
HSE East Tel 01-6352145 Kildare Dublin Wicklow	HSE West Tel 091-775200 Mayo Roscommon Galway