



Respiratory Illness Guidance for School and Childcare Providers

Respiratory Illness Quick Guide

Causes	Respiratory illness is caused by viruses. A person infected with one of these viruses is contagious, which means that they can pass the virus to other people.
Incubation period	The usual period from initial infection to the time symptoms appear (incubation period) is 2 to 8 days after exposure for a person to develop symptoms.
Symptoms	Congestion, runny nose, sneezing, decrease in appetite, fever, coughing
Duration of illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most individuals recover in 8 to 15 days.• A negative RSV test is not required for students or staff
Mode of Transmission	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spread by respiratory droplets either directly through the air or indirectly by hands, tissues, or mouthed toys.• Viruses in respiratory droplets can live on surfaces for many hours.• Contact with respiratory droplets containing virus particles after a sick person coughs or sneezes.
Diagnosis	A health care provider can take a swab of the nose or throat to find the virus.
Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most people with respiratory illness recover without treatment and on their own in 8 to 15 days.• People with respiratory symptoms can take steps to relieve symptoms:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Manage fever and discomfort with over-the-counter medications, drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated
Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. The virus is easily removed with soap and water.• Help children wash their hands. Teach them how to wash their hands and make sure they wash them often.• Throw away used tissues and teach children to cover their mouths and nose when they cough or sneeze.• Clean with soap and water and disinfect surfaces.• Avoid close contact, such as kissing, shaking hands, and sharing cups, eating utensils, and toys, with others.

How to Help Reduce the Spread of Illness in Schools

- Encourage annual flu vaccinations and COVID-19 boosters. Vaccinations are the best way to protect against respiratory illness.
- Encourage students, parents, and staff to take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs.
 - Encourage students and staff to stay home when sick.
 - Inform students, parents, and staff about the importance of staying home when sick until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever* or signs of a fever (chills, feeling very warm, flushed appearance, or sweating) without the use of fever-reducing medicine.
- Encourage hand hygiene among students and staff.
- Encourage students and staff to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or their bent arm. If they use a tissue, they should put the used tissue in a trash can and wash their hands.
- Encourage routine surface cleaning through education, policy, and the provision of supplies. How To Clean and Disinfect Schools to Help Slow the Spread of Flu.
- A negative RSV test is not required for staff and/or student to return.

Infection Prevention Practices

Hand Hygiene

- Teach students and staff to wash hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds, dry hands with a

paper towel, and use the paper towel to turn off the faucet. If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol may be used.

- Include handwashing time in student schedules.
- Teach children how to wash their hands and assist them.
- Provide adequate supplies, including clean and functional handwashing stations, soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Respiratory Hygiene and Cough Etiquette

- Individuals may consider wearing a mask to reduce the risk of respiratory diseases such as RSV, Influenza and COVID-19.
- Provide adequate supplies within easy reach, including tissues and no-touch trash cans.
- Encourage students and staff to keep their hands away from their eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Teach and encourage individuals to cover their mouths and nose when they cough or sneeze.
- Properly discard used tissues in trash cans and sanitize hands after.

Cleaning and Disinfection

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, and phones. Empty trash cans as needed.
- Use general cleaning products that you normally use. Always follow product label directions.
- Provide adequate supplies, such as general EPA-registered cleaning products, gloves, disinfecting wipes, and no-touch trash cans.
- Match your cleaning activities to the types of germs you want to remove or kill.
- Flu viruses are fragile, so standard practices, such as cleaning with soap and water, can help remove and kill them.
 - Studies have shown that the flu virus can live and potentially infect a person for only 2 to 8 hours after being deposited on a surface. Therefore, special sanitizing processes beyond routine cleaning, including closing schools to clean every surface in the building, are not necessary or recommended to slow the spread of flu, even during a flu outbreak.
- Some schools may include other cleaning and disinfecting practices in their standard procedures to address germs that are not removed or killed by soap and water alone.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

CDC:

- [Guidance for School Administrators to Help Reduce the Spread of Seasonal Influenza in K-12 Schools](#)
- [How to Clean and Disinfect Schools to Help Slow the Spread of Flu](#)