



MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

February 8, 2019

A Message from the Mississippi State Department of Health about Influenza

Dear School Superintendent/Principal,

The Mississippi State Department of Health is reporting widespread influenza in the state. While not unexpected for this time of year, we are seeing the highest influenza activity reported so far this season. Additionally we have heard of schools being impacted by increased absences due to influenza. School-aged children are often a group with high rates of influenza infection; in Mississippi most of the reported flu-like illnesses are in individuals <24 years of age. **Even though we are in the middle of the flu season, it's not too late to get vaccinated. Vaccination is the best way to decrease the risk of influenza infection and the best way to reduce the risk of complications from influenza.**

Basic infection control in school settings should always be promoted and maintained, not only during flu season. For full details on influenza prevention in school settings, see the CDC **Guidance for School Administrators to Help Reduce the Spread of Seasonal Influenza in K-12 Schools** at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/guidance.htm>. Below is a summary of activities schools can take to prevent the spread of influenza.

Key Points to Prevent the Spread of Flu in Schools

- **Encourage students, parents, and staff to get a yearly flu vaccine**—Teach students, parents, and staff that the single best way to protect against the flu is to get vaccinated each flu season.
- **Stay home when sick**—Students and staff with flu-like illness should stay home until fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicines. They should stay home even if they are using antiviral drugs.
- **Separate ill students and staff**—Students and staff who appear to have flu-like illness should be sent to a room separate from others until they can be sent home. CDC recommends that they wear a surgical mask, if possible, and that those who care for ill students and staff wear protective gear such as a mask.
- **Hand hygiene**—CDC recommends that students and staff be encouraged to wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- **Respiratory etiquette**—CDC recommends covering the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or a shirt sleeve or elbow if no tissue is available) and throwing the tissue in the trash after use.
- **Routine cleaning**—School staff should routinely clean areas that students and staff touch often with the cleaners they typically use. Special cleaning and disinfecting processes, including wiping down walls and ceilings, are not necessary or recommended. For guidance to slow the spread of flu in schools with cleaning and disinfecting, see http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/updated/cleaning_disinfecting_schools.pdf

Regards,

Paul Byers, MD
State Epidemiologist