



# County of San Diego

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PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER

December 20, 2017

TO: School District Superintendents  
School District Nurses

## **Influenza Activity Update for 2017/2018 Season**

Dear School District Superintendents and Nurses:

This letter provides an update about when to call Public Health Services (PHS) to report an outbreak, as well as information about how to help keep your students and staff healthy.

**Brief Update.** Influenza activity is increasing in San Diego County, as well as nationally. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has warned that this may be a severe influenza season. There have been no local school-based outbreaks so far this season, but outbreaks can occur and they can be prevented by vaccination and good hygiene. Please promote influenza vaccine to school staff, students, and families. It is not too late to receive flu vaccine because peak influenza activity often persists into late winter to early spring.

**Reporting to Public Health Services.** We are requesting that you notify the PHS Epidemiology Program (619-692-8499) if you become aware of a student at your school who is critically ill, hospitalized, or has died from suspected or confirmed influenza. In addition, please notify the Epidemiology Program in the following circumstances:

- At least 10% of average daily attendance is absent with influenza-like illness (ILI),\* sustained over a 3-day period.
- When 20% of an epidemiologically-linked group (e.g., single classroom, sports team, or after-school group) has ILI sustained over a 3-day period, with a minimum of 5 ill individuals.

*\*ILI is defined as fever ( $\geq 100^{\circ}F$  or  $37.8^{\circ}C$ ) plus cough and/or sore throat.*

**Prevention.** We appreciate the efforts of school health personnel in preventing the spread of influenza. There are many respiratory infections that can spread from person-to-person and cause symptoms similar to influenza. The recommendations listed below may not only help reduce the spread of influenza, but other viruses and bacteria circulating in the community, as well.

The following page has recommendations that can help keep your students and staff healthy through this influenza season.

**Encourage students, parents, and staff to get a yearly influenza or “flu” vaccine.**

- The seasonal flu vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older, unless there is a contraindication determined by a medical provider.
- It is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that all health care personnel obtain the annual vaccination.
- Despite media reports to the contrary, it is not clear how good a match this year’s seasonal flu vaccine is for the circulating H3N2 seasonal influenza strain compared to previous years. It is important to note that all of the strains for which the flu vaccine provides protection are currently causing illness in San Diego county. Influenza vaccine is the best defense to protect individuals from illness. The vaccine is safe and effective, and can help prevent severe complications and hospitalization due to influenza.
- Flu vaccines have a very good safety record. Hundreds of millions of Americans have received the vaccine over the years. The most common side effects are soreness, redness, or swelling at the injection site. The flu vaccine cannot make you sick or give you the flu!

**Encourage students, parents, and staff to take everyday prevention steps.**

- Promote good respiratory etiquette. It is recommended that ill persons cover their mouths and noses with a tissue when they cough or sneeze, or to cough into their elbows.
- Encourage good hand hygiene, which means hand washing with soap and water for 20 seconds.
  - If soap and water is not available, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol may be used.
- Surfaces that are touched often should be routinely cleaned using the general cleaning products already in use and following the manufacturer’s instructions.
  - These surfaces may include desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, any hands-on learning objects, faucet handles, and phones.
- Promote policies that encourage students and staff who are ill to stay home.
  - Students who are ill with ILI should stay home until at least 24 hours after their fevers are gone (without the use of medicine).
  - If a healthcare provider prescribes antiviral medication, students and staff should be encouraged to take it as prescribed and complete the course of medicine.

We will continue to monitor influenza activity within the county through the season and are available to answer questions you may have about influenza prevention or outbreaks. To obtain a weekly summary of local influenza activity, contact [EpiDiv.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:EpiDiv.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov) and request to be added to the Influenza Watch distribution list. Please call the Epidemiology Program at 619-692-8499 for additional information.

Sincerely,

  
Wilma J. Wooten, M.D., M.P.H.  
Public Health Officer  
Director, Public Health Services