

### What is influenza?

Influenza is an acute, highly contagious respiratory disease. It is characterized by sudden onset of fever, body aches, sore throat, headache and cough. About one in four children will also have vomiting, diarrhea and nausea in addition to the respiratory symptoms. Influenza is caused by a virus and should not be treated with antibiotics.

### What should be done to prevent or reduce the spread of influenza in schools?

- ✓ **Stay home when ill.** Any employee, student, teacher, or staff suspected of having influenza should not attend school.
- ✓ **Wash hands often.** Wash hands several times a day using soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds (this is generally around the time it takes to sing the ABC's). Dry hands with paper towels or automatic hand dryers if possible. In school, allow regular breaks for the students and teachers to wash hands. Young children should be instructed and assisted to ensure proper hand hygiene. Restrooms should be checked regularly to ensure that soap and paper towels are always available.
- ✓ **Throw away tissues.** Influenza can be spread from coughs or sneezes. Make sure tissues are available in all classrooms. Students and staff should cover their mouths with their upper arm or a tissue when coughing and use a tissue when sneezing or blowing their noses. Tissues should be thrown away immediately followed by proper hand hygiene.
- ✓ **Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.** Alcohol-based hand gels may be used in classrooms to minimize disruption. Hand sanitizer is effective in killing germs on hands when they are not visibly soiled. Appropriate times to use hand sanitizer are after coughing, sneezing, or contact with infected surfaces (e.g., desk, doorknob).
- ✓ **Report absence 10 percent or greater.** Schools with 10 percent or more of their total enrollment absent on a given day due to illness should report this to their local health department and the Iowa Department of Public Health (1-800-362-2736). Reporting outbreaks assists in disease surveillance and understanding the impact of influenza on the community.
- ✓ **It is not necessary to cancel school due to influenza cases.** Closure of individual schools in the event of an outbreak has not proven to be an effective way of stopping the spread of influenza but that decision should be made by the appropriate school officials based on other considerations.
- ✓ **Avoid close contact.** Schools should be extra-vigilant that ill students be excluded from sports activities, choir or any activities that may involve close contact, since transmission of influenza may be easier in these situations. All students and staff should avoid sharing of saliva, i.e., sharing glasses, water bottles, other drinks, spoons/forks, or kissing, etc.
- ✓ **Don't forget about the school bus.** School buses, because of the enclosed space, may allow for easy spread of influenza. Tissues should be available on the buses, and students should be encouraged to cover nose and mouth while coughing or sneezing. Disinfect commonly handled interior surfaces (i.e., door handles, hand rails, etc.) between groups of students, if possible. Consider making alcohol-based hand gel available on buses since hand washing facilities are not available.
- ✓ **Clean surfaces frequently.** In the school, clean commonly used surfaces such as door handles, handrails, eating surfaces, desks, etc., frequently with disinfectant (bleach solutions or commercial disinfectants are appropriate).

### Who should get the influenza vaccine?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends persons who are at risk for complications from influenza be vaccinated annually. However it is wise for everyone to receive an influenza vaccination every year. Listed below are the individuals who should receive the influenza vaccine:

- Persons at high risk for influenza-related complications and severe disease, including
  - children aged 6--59 months,
  - pregnant women,
  - persons aged  $\geq 50$  years,
  - persons of any age with certain chronic medical conditions; and
- Persons who live with or care for persons at high risk, including
  - household contacts who have frequent contact with persons at high risk and who can transmit influenza to those persons at high risk and
  - health-care workers.

Any otherwise healthy non-pregnant person aged 5-49 is eligible for the influenza nasal vaccine (FluMist®).