December 2022

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Fairfax County is already experiencing elevated levels of respiratory illness in our community, including coughs, colds, sore throats, COVID-19, and influenza (“flu”). While these illnesses are not unusual for this time of year, there are several things that you can do to protect your child and others.

To help control the spread of respiratory illnesses:

* **Look for signs of illness in your child.** Symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar and can include fever (100.4°F or higher), headache, tiredness, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea may also occur. Symptoms of throat infections commonly include fever and sore throat without the stuffy nose and cough. The common cold usually does not cause a fever.
* **Contact your doctor or healthcare provider if your child has symptoms of a respiratory illness.**
* **Keep children home when they are ill to prevent the illness from spreading to others**. If your child has symptoms of respiratory illness, they should remain home and away from others until the fever has been gone for 24 hours (without fever-reducing medication such as Tylenol®) and symptoms are improving. If your child has COVID-19 symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19, they should stay home for a full five days after the first day they began to experience symptoms. They should wear a [well-fitted mask](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/isolation.html) when around others for Days 6-10. Children who have tested positive for COVID can remove their mask sooner if they take two home tests with negative results 48 hours apart. The first test can be given on Day 6. If your doctor or healthcare provider prescribes treatment for your child, follow all the directions for taking the medicine. If your child has been diagnosed with bacterial pharyngitis (“strep throat”), they should remain home for at least 24 hours after starting antibiotics so as not to spread disease to others.
* **Get tested for COVID-19.** If your child is experiencing respiratory symptoms, you can get them tested for COVID-19 at a pharmacy or doctors’ office, or you can test children ages 2 and older for COVID-19 using an at-home antigen test kit. At-home testing kits are widely available and are highly reliable when done correctly. You can request an at-home test kit from your school office if you do not have access to one.
* **Teach your child how to stop the spread of illness:**
* Use tissues and dispose of them properly.
* Cover your mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, or cough into your upper sleeve.
* Do not cough or sneeze into your hands.
* Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth to prevent the spread of germs.
* Wash hands regularly with soap and water for 20 seconds.
* Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers when soap and water are not available (with supervision for younger children).
* Do not share drinking glasses or eating utensils.
* **Clean and disinfect surfaces at home that people often touch.** Use regular household cleaning products or mix ¼ cup chlorine bleach with one gallon of cool water to wipe down often touched areas. Always follow label instructions for any disinfectant.
* **Have your child vaccinated against flu and COVID-19.** Vaccination is the single best way to protect against the flu and COVID-19. Flu and COVID-19 vaccines are available at doctors’ offices and pharmacies, and both vaccines can be given at the same visit. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (*CDC) recommends everyone aged 6 months and older receive the flu vaccine each year and stay up-to-date with COVID-19 vaccines for their age group.* Staying up-to-date on COVID-19 vaccines means completing the initial dose series and all booster doses for which your child is eligible. The recently-approved bivalent booster dose for ages 5 and older offers an improved level of protection against the Omicron variant currently circulating.

Fact sheets on influenza and COVID-19 are attached for more information. If you have any questions, please contact your school public health nurse.

Sincerely,



Gloria Addo-Ayensu, MD, MPH

Director of Health

**Influenza Fact Sheet**

**What is influenza?**

Influenza is commonly referred to as "the flu." It is caused by a virus. There are two main types of influenza virus: A and B.

**When does influenza occur?**

Influenza typically occurs in the late fall and winter months in the United States and sometimes continues into the spring.

**Who gets influenza?**

Anyone can get influenza. Illness is most serious in young children, older adults, people with chronic illnesses (e.g., lung disease, heart disease, cancer, or diabetes) or those with weak immune systems.

**How is it spread?**

Influenza spreads easily in secretions from the nose or throat, usually when an ill person coughs or sneezes. One also can get influenza from touching a surface, like a table or doorknob, that is contaminated with the secretions of someone who is ill and then touching their mouth, nose, or eye.

**How soon after exposure do symptoms appear? What are the symptoms of influenza?**

Symptoms usually appear 1 to 3 days after exposure. Influenza symptoms can include fever, headache, chills, cough, sore throat, and body aches. Diarrhea is not common. Although most people are ill for less than a week, some people have serious illness and may need to be hospitalized.

**How is influenza diagnosed and treated?**

Lab tests are available to diagnose influenza. Rest, liquids, and over-the-counter medicine (e.g., acetaminophen [Tylenol®]) are the usual treatments. Some prescription drugs may reduce the severity of influenza. Aspirin should not be given to children with flu-like illnesses because of the possibility of a serious complication called Reye’s syndrome. Since influenza is a virus, antibiotics are not effective in treating the flu.

**How long can a person spread influenza?**

Influenza can spread from one person to another beginning about one day before to about a week after the illness starts.

**Who should be vaccinated against influenza?**

All children ages 6 months and older and all adults are recommended by CDC for influenza vaccination (except for those who have a specific reason not to get the vaccine such as an allergy). Vaccination every year is important because: 1) influenza viruses change from year to year, and 2) protection from the vaccine decreases over time.

Particular effort should be made to vaccinate people at higher risk for influenza infection or complications. This includes all children aged 6 months to 18 years, all persons aged >50 years, and:

• Women who will be pregnant during the influenza season;

• Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities;

• People who have long-term heart or lung problems, including asthma; and,

• People who have other serious medical conditions, such as kidney disease, cystic fibrosis, diabetes, anemia, cancer, weak immune systems (including those with HIV), or a seizure disorder.

People in these higher risk groups also can be protected if those around them are vaccinated against influenza.

**What else can one do to stop the spread of influenza?**

Good health habits can help prevent influenza. These include covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing; washing your hands often; avoiding touching your eyes, nose, or mouth; staying home from work, school, and errands when you are sick; and avoiding close contact with people who are sick. Antiviral medications may also be used to prevent or treat influenza but are not a substitute for vaccination. For more information, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (www.cdc.gov/flu/) or talk to a healthcare professional.

**COVID-19 Fact Sheet**

**What is COVID-19?**

COVID-19, also known as coronavirus, is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

**When does COVID-19 occur?**

COVID-19 infection can happen at any time during the year but often occurs in the late fall and winter months.

**Who gets** **COVID-19?**

Anyone can get COVID-19. Most people infected with the virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory symptoms and recover without needing special treatment. However, some will become seriously ill and require medical attention. Older adults and those with underlying medical conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, or cancer are more likely to develop serious illness.

**How is it spread?**

COVID-19 spreads easily in secretions from the nose or throat of an infected person in the form respiratory droplets or aerosols when they cough, sneeze, talk, sing, or breathe.

**How soon after exposure do symptoms appear? What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

Symptoms can appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. COVID-19 symptoms can include fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle aches, headache, new loss or taste or smell, sore throat, runny nose, nausea, and diarrhea. Contact your healthcare provider if any symptoms are severe or concerning to you.

**How is COVID-19 diagnosed and treated?**

Viral tests look for a current infection with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, by testing specimens from your nose or mouth. There are two main types of viral tests: nucleic acid amplification tests (NAATs) and antigen tests. In certain circumstances, one test type may be recommended over the other.

* NAATs, such as PCR-based tests, are most often performed in a laboratory. They are typically the most reliable tests for people with or without symptoms. These tests detect viral genetic material, which may stay in your body for up to 90 days after you test positive. Therefore, you should not use a NAAT if you have tested positive in the last 90 days.
* Antigen tests are rapid tests which produce results in 15-30 minutes. They are less reliable than NAATs, especially for people who do not have symptoms. A single, negative antigen test result does not rule out infection. To best detect infection, a negative antigen test should be repeated at least 48 hours apart (known as serial testing). Sometimes a follow-up NAAT may be recommended to confirm an antigen test result.

Self-tests, or at-home tests, are usually antigen tests that can be taken anywhere without having to go to a specific testing site. You can order free self-test kits at [www.covid.gov/tests](http://www.covid.gov/tests) or purchase tests online, in pharmacies, and retail stores. Follow FDA and manufacturer’s instructions, including any instructions on serial testing. You can also visit FDA’s website to see a list of authorized tests.

Mild to moderate symptoms can be improved with the use of over-the-counter medications. Contact your healthcare provider to determine if you are eligible for treatment, even if your symptoms are mild.

**How long should someone isolate after testing positive with** **COVID-19?**

People who are asymptomatic and people with mild symptoms of COVID-19 should isolate away from others for at least 5 days from symptom onset or the positive COVID-19 test date. Well-fitting masks should be worn through day 10. People with moderate or severe symptoms should remain in isolation through at least day 10.

**Who should be vaccinated against COVID-19?**

All people 6 months and older should get a COVID-19 vaccine. Contact your primary healthcare provider if you are allergic to the vaccine’s ingredients.

Four COVID-19 vaccines are approved or authorized in the United States:

* Pfizer-BioNTech
* Moderna
* Novavax
* Johnson & Johnson’s Janssen (J&J/Janssen)

Please note, CDC recommends that the J&J/Janssen COVID-19 vaccine only be considered in certain situations, due to safety concerns.

**What else can one do to stop the spread of COVID-19?**

Becoming educated about COVID-19 and how it spreads is an important step in slowing the transmission. Good hygiene practices such as covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing; washing your hands often; avoiding touching your eyes, nose, or mouth; staying home from work, school, and errands when you are sick; and avoiding close contact with people who are sick. The COVID-19 vaccine can reduce the risk of serious illness, hospitalization, and death. It is important to stay up to date with all recommended vaccine doses, including boosters.