New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) Provides Guidance to Schools and Childcare Facilities in Response to Widespread Influenza Activity Across the State

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The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) is currently reporting widespread influenza (flu) activity in all regions of the state. Influenza-like illness continues to increase in New Mexico from 4.6% in week two of the new year, to 5.8% last week. While it is not possible to predict when influenza activity will peak or end, schools and childcare settings can limit the impact of influenza on students and staff.

NMDOH recommends that schools and childcare settings increase education on respiratory and hand hygiene. As well as, monitoring staff and attendees for acute febrile respiratory illness. Ill attendees and staff should be sent home.

Staff and children (as developmentally appropriate) should all be taught and asked to follow these steps that prevent the transmission of respiratory infections such as influenza by:

• Cover your coughs and sneezes.
• Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
• Wash hands frequently with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing.
• Stay home if you’re sick, especially with a fever.

Staff and parents should be made aware of the symptoms of influenza. Symptoms associated with the flu can include:

• Fever (although not everyone with flu has a fever)
• Cough
• Sore throat
• Runny or stuffy nose
• Body aches
• Headache
• Chills
• Tiredness
• Sometimes diarrhea and vomiting

School or childcare attendees and staff with an acute febrile respiratory illness should be sent home with instructions to stay at home, until fever free for 24-hours without use of fever reducing medication. Instructions should be given to seek medical care with worsening of symptoms.

It is not too late to get vaccinated! All people 6 months of age and older are recommended to annually receive the influenza vaccine. Getting vaccinated yourself protects people around you, including those who are more vulnerable to serious flu illnesses, like babies and young children.
older people, and people with certain chronic health conditions. While flu vaccine is not perfect and some people who get vaccinated may still get the flu, there is some data to suggest that flu vaccination may make the illness milder.

Additional recommendations to help reduce the spread of flu in schools include:

- Separate sick students and staff from others until they can be picked up to go home.
- Provide adequate supplies, including clean and functional handwashing stations, soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Include handwashing time in student schedules.
- Encourage routine surface cleaning through education, policy, and the provision of supplies.
- Match your cleaning activities to the types of germs you want to remove or kill.
  - Flu viruses are relatively 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.
- Establish relationships with state and local public health officials for ongoing communication and recommendations.
  - Follow your local flu situation.
  - Update your emergency plans so that they are in place before an outbreak occurs.
- NMDOH does not recommend school closure for control of influenza. On rare occasions, a school may need to close during influenza season due to staff illness and an inability to adequately staff the school.

Please call NMDOH if you are contemplating a school closure. To report suspected or confirmed outbreaks of influenza like illness, or to consult an on-call epidemiologist. Please contact the New Mexico Department of Health, Epidemiology and Response Division (ERD) 24/7/365 at (505) 827-0006.