

## MSAD # 13 / RSU #83

### Health Alert

#### Influenza and Influenza Like Illnesses Important Notice to Parents

Influenza is a respiratory disease caused by influenza viruses. Influenza viruses cause an infection of the upper airway and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Symptoms can include fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches and headaches. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults. Infections can be mild to severe with symptoms lasting from a few days to several weeks. Annual activity most commonly occurs between December and April. Complications are more severe for the very young, the very old, and pregnant women. Note Influenza is a disease of the respiratory tract. Gastrointestinal symptoms alone, often reported as “flu” or “stomach flu,” do not constitute influenza. Diagnosis can be confirmed by laboratory tests on respiratory secretions.

There are three types of flu viruses: A, B, and C. Type A and B cause the annual influenza epidemics that have up to 20% of the population sniffing, aching, coughing, and running high fevers. Type C is uncommon but also causes flu. Type C flu symptoms are much less severe than those of A or B. Unlike type A flu viruses, type B flu is found only in humans. Type B flu may cause a less severe reaction than type A flu virus, but occasionally, type B flu can still be extremely harmful. Type A, B, or C influenza can sometimes be treated with prescription antiviral medications as directed by a health care provider.

Influenza viruses are spread mainly by droplets when people with flu cough or sneeze. Influenza viruses are released into the air and can be inhaled by others. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something contaminated with influenza virus and then touching their mouth or nose.

The incubation period for influenza is 1–4 days. People are generally infectious to others beginning 1 day before symptoms start until up to 7 days after becoming sick. Some children can be infectious longer than 7 days.

The best protection is an annual flu vaccination before flu season starts. Each year the vaccine contains the types of flu virus predicted to cause illness in the coming year. Therefore, it is important to be vaccinated each year. The vaccine takes 14 days for the full protective effect to occur.

Maine CDC shares the following measures to help protect you and your family from the spread of influenza.

- Rest. Get lots of it. When we are tired, our resistance to illness drops. This is not a time when we can afford to have this happen. Students have busy academic, athletic, and social schedules. They can easily get quite ‘run down’. Make sure children are getting adequate (even extra) rest. This will help keep up their immune system.
- Good hand hygiene: people should wash hands or use alcohol hand rubs or gels after being in public or after contact with anyone with a cold or influenza
- When coughing, one should turn the head and cough or sneeze into a disposable tissue and promptly dispose of the used tissue; or cough into the inside of the elbow if a tissue is not available.
- Avoid taking young children or immunocompromised people into large crowds unnecessarily when influenza is in the community
- Avoid close contact (holding, kissing) between infants and anyone who has a cold or the flu
- Do not share things that go into the mouth, such as drinking cups, straws, etc.
- If people are experiencing respiratory symptoms with a fever, they should stay home to prevent spread of the infection.
- If you have concerns about your child’s illness, contact your health care provider.

Management and Treatment of flu:

Activity: Light activity until symptoms and fever disappear. Rest as much as possible.

Diet: Drink at least two quarts of fluid per day -- water, juice, etc. Eat a regular diet as tolerated.

Medication: Take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) as directed for body aches and or fever. Take cough medicine as indicated for cough.

Other Instructions: Gargle with warm salt water as needed for sore throat. Wash your hands often, use tissues when coughing or sneezing and properly dispose of it.

Physician follow-up: Call your health care provider if you have a fever that persists for more than 2 to 3 days, you have any recurrences of symptoms, or you have any questions or concerns about your illness.

Lastly, please keep sick children at home. **Children should be free of fever, vomiting and/or diarrhea for 24 hours before returning to school.** This gives them adequate time to recuperate and not spread the virus to others.

Please contact the school nurse, Mel Chadbourne, RN if you have any questions. More information is also available at the Maine CDC web site.

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