

## Influenza outbreaks occurring in schools

In the last week Regional Public Health has been notified of influenza outbreaks in a number of schools and early child education centres in the greater Wellington region.

The symptoms of influenza are fever, cough and sometimes vomiting or diarrhoea in younger children. Influenza spreads quickly in schools and 20-30% absenteeism is not uncommon.

To reduce further spread in schools and communities we advise the following:

1. **PLEASE SHARE THE ATTACHED INFLUENZA INFORMATION (PAGE 2) WITH PARENTS AND THE WIDER SCHOOL COMMUNITY.**
2. **Make sure everyone covers their mouth and nose with tissues when coughing and sneezing** and have tissues readily available.
3. **Make sure students (and staff) with symptoms stay at home until they are well and free of symptoms.** Students can still be infectious even when symptoms improve so ensure they do not return to school until 48hrs after symptoms have stopped.
4. **Encourage everyone to wash their hands regularly** and make sure they have the supplies to do so. Wash hands several times a day using soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds and then dry hands thoroughly. Alcohol-based hand rubs also may be used. Toilets should be checked regularly to ensure that soap and paper towels are always available.
5. **Put up handwashing posters on noticeboards and in bathrooms.** Posters are available at <http://www.rph.org.nz/public-health-topics/illness-and-disease/influenza/education-sector/>
6. **Clean surfaces that are touched often (door handles, bench tops, toilets, bathroom areas) every day.** One of the most effective and cheapest disinfecting solutions to clean these surfaces is a solution of household bleach and water.
7. **If children or staff become unwell while at school** they should be rested in an area away from others where they can be monitored until they are able to be taken home. Staff caring for ill children should take care to avoid becoming ill themselves by washing hands regularly after any contact and minimising close contact time.

**To monitor illness in the community please notify Regional Public Health of possible outbreaks: In schools and colleges this is daily absenteeism of 15% or higher.**

Useful information to record includes the number of students/staff with illness, the type of symptoms and whether the illness is occurring across all areas in the school. Visit [Illness log for schools](#) (also available at the above link)

If you have any queries relating to this letter please contact Regional Public Health on 04 570 9002 and ask to speak with a communicable disease public health nurse, or contact your school public health nurse.

Nga mihi - Dr Annette Nesdale, Medical Officer of Health



## Information for parents and local school community

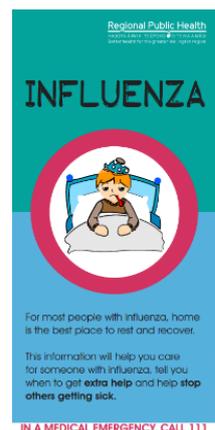
### Influenza outbreaks in schools in the greater Wellington region

Several schools and early child education centres in the Wellington region currently have an influenza outbreak.

The main symptoms of influenza are fever, cough and sometimes vomiting or diarrhoea in younger children. These symptoms usually last 3-4 days but can be up to 7 days.

The following information will help reduce the spread of influenza and assist your school:

1. Advise a member of staff if your child has an illness as described above.
2. Check that your school has your correct and up-to-date contact details in case they need to contact you.
3. Keep sick children at home until feeling well and free from symptoms (usually 3-4 days but up to 7 days). Sick staff and students should not be at social or sporting events, school productions or camps. This is so they can rest and recover and don't spread illness to others.
4. It is important to use tissues to cover coughs and sneezes and to be very good about washing and drying hands thoroughly. An [influenza brochure](#) accessible at [www.rph.org.nz/influenza](http://www.rph.org.nz/influenza) has some good tips for looking after people with influenza and stopping it spreading to other people at home.
5. If anyone in your family has influenza we ask that they don't visit hospitals or community care homes or see people who may be at high risk of serious illness, such as pregnant women, young babies, or anyone who has cancer, lung, and heart or kidney conditions.



**If you are worried about your child's symptoms or they have long-term health problems (e.g. asthma, diabetes, kidney, heart or immunity problems), then you should phone their usual doctor or Healthline 0800 611 116 for further advice. Otherwise they should recover at home and see their GP only if the illness gets worse or is not improving.**

Nga mihi nui  
Dr Annette Nesdale, Medical Officer of Health  
Regional Public Health