Acute Respiratory Illness (Influenza, RSV, COVID-19, etc.) Outbreak Response: Schools and Early Childhood Education Centers, Updated May 2023

Note: Facilities located in counties or municipalities with independent health departments should continue to follow guidance as provided by the local health department. This includes providers in Allegheny, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Erie, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties and those in Allentown, Bethlehem, Wilkes-Barre, and York cities.

Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH) fact sheets are available at [RSV.pdf (pa.gov),](#) [Flu (pa.gov),](#) and [Coronavirus in Pennsylvania (pa.gov).](#)

Exclusion criteria for staff and children (note that all licensing agency requirements should be followed)

- Exclude until fever free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication.[*]

Reporting criteria to the PADOH[†]

- Outbreaks/suspected outbreaks should be reported to PADOH by contacting 1-877-PA-HEALTH or the local health department.
- Individual cases of influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), or COVID-19 do not need to be reported by the school/childcare center. For example, a single case in the absence of an outbreak being identified do not need to be reported, unless specifically requested by PADOH. Individual cases may be reported if the facility has concerns about increased severity (hospitalizations or deaths) of the case. School/childcare centers may opt to report and consult with PADOH on any case of concern, at any point in time. PADOH may contact school/childcare centers to request specific information on cases.

Outbreak definitions

- Two or more staff or students with the same confirmed pathogen (such as flu, RSV, or COVID-19) within a 7-day period who are epi-linked by classroom, wing (i.e., in the same classroom or wing), or attended a group activity together).[††]
  -OR-
- Increase in absenteeism facility-wide with parents or staff reporting influenza-like illness (ILI) symptoms (including coughing, sneezing, runny nose, fever, myalgia, malaise, sore throat, and wheezing) sustained over a 3-day period, regardless of epi linkage (i.e., absenteeism does not need to be from the same classroom or wing). This can also include one confirmed RSV or influenza case and other individuals reporting similar symptoms.[¶, §]
  -OR-
- Increase in absenteeism facility-wide with parents or staff reporting COVID-19 compatible symptoms (including coughing, fever or chills, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, body aches, headache, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, runny nose or congestion, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea) sustained over a 3-day period, regardless of epi linkage (i.e., absenteeism does not need to be from the same classroom or wing). This can also include one laboratory confirmed COVID-19 case and other individuals reporting similar symptoms.[¶, §]

Prevention and Control

- Encourage yearly influenza vaccination in children and staff. Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent influenza in schools and early childcare settings.
- Encourage staff and student to remain up-to-date with COVID-19 vaccinations. COVID-19 vaccinations are the most effective way to prevent people from getting seriously ill, being hospitalized, or dying from COVID-19.
- Reinforce frequent hand washing with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Reinforce respiratory etiquette to students and staff, such as:
  - Coughing and sneezing into a tissue or elbow.
  - Properly disposing of tissues.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Follow the facility/school's illness policies if ILI or COVID-19 symptoms develop during the school day.
- Avoid close contact with sick people, if possible.
- Encourage students and staff to stay home when sick. Individuals who have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or other respiratory illness should be encouraged to stay home until symptoms have improved.
- Individuals awaiting COVID-19 testing results should be encouraged to say home until test results are known.
- Follow isolation and precaution information for people with COVID-19.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as toys, doorknobs, and mobile devices, at least once a day and when visibly dirty.

Additional resources

RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus) | CDC
Protect Your Child from RSV Infographic | CDC
RSV in Infants and Young Children (cdc.gov)
Flu Childcare (pa.gov)
Information for Schools & Childcare Providers | CDC
Guidance for School Administrators to Help Reduce the Spread of Seasonal Influenza in K-12 Schools | CDC
Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs to Support Safe In-Person Learning | CDC
Isolation and Precautions for People with COVID-19 | CDC
Symptoms of COVID-19 | CDC
COVID-19 Testing: What You Need to Know | CDC
Stay Up to Date with COVID-19 Vaccines | CDC
When and How to Clean and Disinfect a Facility | CDC
Improving Ventilation In Buildings | CDC

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*Per 28 PA. Code § 27.76. Exclusion and readmission of children, and staff having contact with children, in child care group settings and 28 PA Code § 27.72. Exclusion of children, and staff having contact with children, for showing symptoms

† Per 28. PA. Code § 27.3 Reporting outbreaks and unusual diseases, infections, and conditions.

††A single case of RSV, flu, or COVID-19 simultaneously occurring within a 7-day period would not be considered an outbreak; however, the PADOH is available to assist with recommendations related to co-circulating pathogens as well as multi-pathogen outbreaks.

¶Per 28 Pa. Code § 27.21a Reporting of cases by healthcare practitioners and health care facilities
> (c) A school nurse shall report to the local morbidity reporting office (LMRO) any unusual increase in the number of absentees among school children. A caregiver at a childcare group setting shall report to the LMRO any unusual increase in the number of absentees among children attending the childcare group setting.

§Absenteeism reporting can include all-cause syndrome-specific, illness absenteeism, or some other approach. Reporting may occur on the school level, across groups of schools geographically, or by school district.

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