

Date: November 22, 2022

To: School and Daycare Administrators, Teachers and Parents

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Subject: Respiratory Illness in Illinois Schools and Daycares

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) show an early start to respiratory illnesses caused by viruses such as respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), enteroviruses and rhinoviruses, influenza, and COVID-19. Across Lake County, respiratory illnesses are increasing absenteeism in schools and daycares. There are several notable factors that are associated with this increase: 1) relaxing of COVID-19 restrictions, 2) being indoors with limited ventilation and close proximity to other people), and 3) increased respiratory activity during the winter. Many of these viruses are spread to people by coughing and sneezing or by people touching surfaces contaminated with the virus and then touching their face with unwashed hands. These viruses may cause symptoms similar to a common cold, bronchitis and bronchiolitis, ear infections, and pneumonia. However, for people with underlying medical conditions, these viruses can lead to difficulty breathing, hospitalization, and even death.

As we gather with our family and friends during the holidays, it is important to remember strategies to keep children, staff, and volunteers healthy as we head into the winter.

- **Vaccinate.** Stay up to date on all vaccines including influenza and COVID-19.
- **Wash your hands** frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

- **Stay home when sick** until the fever is gone for 24 hours (without use of fever reducing medications) and until symptoms have improved.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes** with a tissue or your upper shirt sleeve and dispose of tissues properly.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- **Avoid close contact**, including kissing or shaking hands, or sharing items such as utensils or cups,
- **Clean and disinfect** frequently touched surfaces using appropriate EPA-approved products. Follow manufacturer's instructions on the correct contact time.
- **Avoid contact with sick people**, especially if an infant (6 months old or less) or an adult with medical conditions.

For questions or further information, please call the Lake County Health Department's Communicable Disease program at (847) 377-8130, option 1. Check out the Health Department's influenza weekly reports. <https://www.lakecountyil.gov/3327/Flu-Season-Monitoring-Reports>