

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



Rick Scott
Governor

Celeste Phillip, MD, MPH
Surgeon General and Secretary

Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

January 27, 2017

Dear Principal or Administrator:

The 2016-17 flu season has begun in Florida. The number of flu infections are increasing across the state, including in children. Flu regularly spreads more quickly among children than in all other age groups. The single best way to protect against seasonal flu and its potentially severe complications for children is to have them get a seasonal influenza vaccine each year. **Please send a letter home to parents encouraging vaccination.**

People infected with influenza are most infectious to others early in the course of their illness. This means it is **important to review school illness exclusion policies with staff, teachers, and parents to ensure children sick with flu are rapidly identified and to ensure parents keep children home when they are sick.** Symptoms of the flu often include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headaches, or fatigue.

The flu vaccine is safe, and continues to be the best way to protect your students, staff, and their families from the flu. The national Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that all individuals six months of age and older receive the flu vaccine each year.

The Florida Department of Health urges schools to help fight the spread of influenza by:

- **Sending a letter to parents encouraging influenza vaccination** (provided on our website), as well, "The Flu: A Guide for Parents" fact sheet found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/updated/fluguideforparents.pdf>
 - Parents and staff can check with their physician, your local health department or visit <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/prevention/flu-prevention/locate-a-flu-shot.html> to search for a flu vaccine location.
- **Ensuring rapid identification of sick students, teachers, and staff, and ensuring they stay home when they are sick.**
- Encouraging students, teachers, and staff to cover their noses and mouths with tissue when you cough or sneeze. Students, teachers, and staff should wash their hands often using soap and warm water.
- Encouraging students, teachers, and staff to avoid touching their eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Cleaning and disinfecting commonly handled surfaces or objects.

For more information on preventing the flu, as well as, specific materials and tools for schools, please visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/>. Please contact your local county health department with any questions and report any suspected influenza outbreaks to your county health department right away. Thank you for your important contribution to protecting the health of those in the community you serve.

Sincerely,

Anna Marie Likos, MD, MPH
State Epidemiologist
Interim Deputy Secretary for Health

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