

Increased Absenteeism Due to Illness in York Region Schools

York Region Public Health has noticed an increase in school absenteeism due to illness. When York Region Public Health receives reports of increased absenteeism, we support the affected schools by providing infection prevention and control measures as well as monitoring of absences in collaboration with the school.

Many viruses are active at this time of year in the community, including enteric viruses (like norovirus) and respiratory viruses (like influenza, commonly known as the flu.) Preventative measures can help reduce the spread of illness in the community.

Norovirus

The most common symptoms of norovirus illness are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramps. The illness often begins suddenly, about 24 to 48 hours after exposure, and the infected person may become very sick with frequent vomiting and/or diarrhea. In general, children experience more vomiting than adults.

To lower the spread of norovirus within our communities:

- Anyone experiencing symptoms should continue to stay home for at least 48 hours after symptoms stop
- Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water, especially after using the toilet or changing diapers and before preparing, handling and eating food
- Remove and wash clothes and linens that may be contaminated with vomit or feces
- Keep sick individuals out of areas where food is being handled or prepared
- Anyone who is sick should not handle or prepare food for at least 48 hours after symptoms stop
- Take precautions to protect yourself when cleaning up vomit and diarrhea, refer to: [Information for Parents](#)

Influenza

Norovirus is not related to influenza, or “the flu”. The flu is a respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus which commonly starts circulating during the late fall and continues into spring.

Symptoms of the flu may include:

- sudden onset of headache
- chills
- cough
- sore throat
- runny nose
- fever
- loss of appetite
- muscle aches
- fatigue

Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may also occur in children. Most people recover from the flu within a week to 10 days. People aged 65 years or older, pregnant women and individuals with chronic health conditions may be at greater risk of becoming ill and developing severe health problems such as pneumonia.

Young children and influenza

Children under five years of age, especially those younger than two years of age, are at high risk of flu-related complications. These complications include pneumonia, encephalopathy (inflammation of the brain), ear infections, sinus infections and worsening of medical problems like asthma or heart disease. In rare cases, flu complications can lead to death.

How to protect against the flu

1. Get vaccinated – The flu vaccine is the best way to protect against flu. Studies show the flu vaccine can prevent 70 to 90 per cent of illness in healthy adults and children. York Region Public Health recommends everyone six months and older get the flu shot. It's not too late to get vaccinated.

Flu shots are available at:

- Physicians' offices, for people six months of age and older
- Pharmacies, for people five years of age and older
- York Region Public Health clinics, for people three years of age and older

Visit ontario.ca/flu to find where you can get the flu shot. For more information about flu vaccines contact York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653.

2. How can you reduce the chances of getting the flu?

- Keep sick children home from school or child care
- Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and warm water. If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Choose an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains between 60% and 90% alcohol
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw the tissue out immediately
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Avoid people who are ill and stay home when you are sick
- Keep common surfaces and items clean and disinfected. To learn more about preventing spread of illness in school and home, visit york.ca/infectionprevention

How does the flu spread?

The flu spreads through the air from coughing and sneezing. It also spreads through direct contact with surfaces, door knobs, unwashed hands, or objects such as toys and eating utensils that have been contaminated by the influenza virus.

A person with flu may be able to infect other people one day before symptoms develop and up to seven days after becoming sick.

For more information, visit york.ca/flu

