



September 20, 2018

Dear School Administrators, Staff, Parents and Guardians:

We want to inform your school community about the **flu** (influenza), **norovirus** and **whooping cough** (also known as **pertussis**) in order to minimize illness and keep kids in class.

Flu and norovirus are more common during the fall and winter months, while whooping cough can occur year round. Please review this letter to learn how to prevent getting sick, symptoms to look for, and how to avoid passing the illness to others. Contact your health care provider for more information on these illnesses.

It is important for staff and students to stay home from school and activities when they are sick to prevent passing the illness to others. School districts follow Washington County Public Health and Oregon Health Authority school exclusion guidelines, which state that a child with flu-like symptoms or vomiting or diarrhea should stay home from school until 24 hours after their symptoms have gone away.

FLU (INFLUENZA)

Influenza is a virus that spreads when someone with the illness coughs, sneezes or talks and small droplets land in the nose or mouth of someone close by. Less often a person might get flu by touching a surface that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth or nose.

Symptoms of influenza usually start suddenly and include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Muscle aches and pains

The flu generally lasts 3-5 days, but can last longer. Consult your health care provider for symptoms that are severe or do not get better.

Prevention:

The best ways to minimize spread of flu at school are:

- **Get yourself and your child(ren) vaccinated if you have not yet had a flu shot this flu season.** Please contact your health care provider or go to flu.oregon.gov to find the nearest location that offers the flu vaccine.
- **Stay home/keep kids home if sick.**
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- Wash hands often with soap and water.

NOROVIRUS

Norovirus used to be called the “stomach flu.” It is a virus that is easily passed person-to-person, by touching surfaces contaminated with the virus, or from contaminated food or water.

Symptoms of norovirus usually start suddenly and include:

- Diarrhea
- Nausea and vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Fever, headache, body aches

You can feel very sick and throw up or have diarrhea many times a day. This usually lasts 1-2 days. Illness can cause dehydration, especially in young children. If they become dehydrated, children may cry with few or no tears, urinate less and be unusually sleepy or fussy. Consult your health care provider for symptoms that are severe or if you are worried about dehydration.

Prevention:

There is no vaccine for norovirus. These steps are important in minimizing spread of norovirus in schools:

- The single best way to prevent getting norovirus is to practice good **handwashing** with soap and water.
- **Stay home/keep kids home if sick.**



WHOOPIING COUGH (PERTUSSIS)

Whooping cough (also called pertussis) is an infection that causes severe coughing. It spreads easily in groups. Infants and young children can become very ill with this infection. Anyone, young or old, can become ill. Most people get vaccines to prevent whooping cough, but protection can wear off over time. All students enrolled in 7th grade are required to have their Tdap booster by school exclusion day: February 20, 2019.

Symptoms:

- First symptoms are cold-like (runny nose, cough)
- An irritating cough starts 1-2 weeks later
- Cough can last for weeks to months
- During coughing attacks, children may gag, gasp or strain to inhale, sometimes making the high-pitched whooping sound.
- No fever or only a mild fever.
- **Any child or staff with cold symptoms and a worsening cough that lasts for at least a week should talk to a health care provider.**

Prevention:

- Staying up to date on immunizations is the best way to prevent the spread of this illness.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- **Stay home/keep sick kids home if sick.**
- Keep babies away from anyone who is coughing

Lastly, now is a good time to review you and your child's immunization history and to make sure you are all up to date. Vaccines are one of the best ways to protect your family from a variety of diseases. They also can decrease the spread of diseases in our schools.

We wish you a happy and healthy school year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christina Baumann MD".

Christina Baumann, MD, MPH
Deputy Health Officer
Washington County Public Health