



Influenza

Definition:

Influenza (the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness and can lead to death. Several types of influenza may circulate at the same time. The most commonly seen types of influenza are influenza A/H1, influenza A/H3 and influenza B.

Signs and symptoms:

Influenza-like illness (ILI) is defined as a fever greater than 100° F with a cough and/or sore throat. Symptoms of influenza can also include runny nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, and fatigue. Vomiting and diarrhea are more common in children than adults.

Transmission:

Influenza is transmitted from person to person mainly by droplets when people with the flu cough, sneeze or talk. It is also possible to get the flu from touching a surface that has flu virus on it and then touching your own mouth or nose. Most people may be able to infect others up to 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5-7 days after becoming sick. The average time between exposure and illness (incubation period) is 2 days.

Diagnosis:

Influenza is diagnosed through a laboratory test. The most common types of tests available are:

- Rapid antigen tests – quick turn-around (usually 20 minutes) but may have false positives and false negatives. Some antigen tests can distinguish between A and B but cannot differentiate further.
- Molecular tests (including PCR) – often longer turn-around time but has very few false positives or false negatives. These tests can distinguish between A and B, and some can determine the subtype.

Role of the School Nurse:

Prevention

- Vaccination – influenza requires an annual vaccination. Most flu vaccines contain 3 subtypes including influenza A/H1, influenza A/H3, and influenza B/Victoria. The specific viruses included may change every year. Not all years will have a good match between the circulating subtypes and those included in the vaccine.
- Provide training and resources for staff and students on the following: (posters available at: www.maine.gov/dhhs/order)
 - Hand washing
 - Respiratory etiquette (covering cough)
 - Staying home when ill

Treatment Recommendations

- Prescription antiviral treatment for influenza is available and is most effective if started within 48 hours. (<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/antivirals/index.htm>)
- Prescription antiviral prophylaxis may be considered for high-risk contacts of cases of influenza. A list of people at greater risk of serious complications can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/index.htm>.

Exclusions

- Students and staff with influenza or ILI should be excluded from school and school related activities until symptoms are getting better overall and they have not had a fever for at least 24 hours.

- It is recommended that any child with a fever of 100° F or greater should be excluded from school. Please follow your individual school's guidelines.

Reporting Requirements

- Individual cases of influenza are not reportable.
- Any sudden increase of ILI (within a classroom, wing etc) should be considered a potential outbreak and should be reported by calling Maine CDC's 24-hour reporting line at 1-800-821-5821.
- If your school has greater than 15% absenteeism this should be reported through the NEO 15% absentee application. If the majority of symptoms are respiratory – this will be considered an ILI outbreak.

Resources:

- Maine DOE website <https://www.maine.gov/doe/>
- Maine CDC influenza website (including fact sheet) www.maineflu.gov
- Influenza Posters www.maine.gov/dhhs/order
- Weekly Influenza Surveillance Reports <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/influenza/influenza-surveillance-weekly-updates.shtml>
- School-based Vaccine Clinic Information <https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/safeschools/healthed/nurseresources/manual/immunization>
- Federal CDC Influenza website <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>