



SEASONAL INFECTIONS: PROTECTING WORKERS IN EDUCATION

This PSHSA Fast Fact is intended to provide information on the prevention of seasonal infections for everyone working in the educational sector



SEASONAL INFECTIONS

Outbreaks of seasonal infections often occur in schools from November to April when staff and students spend more time indoors and in close contact with others who may be sick. Seasonal infections most commonly include respiratory or gastrointestinal infections. Respiratory infections include the common cold, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Gastrointestinal infections (commonly referred to as ‘stomach flu’) caused by norovirus and rotavirus are also quite common.

Employees are at risk of getting sick from exposure to these viruses while at work. Knowing how they are spread and implementing preventive measures will reduce the risk of transmission of seasonal infections to staff and students.



WHAT SHOULD I DO AS AN EMPLOYER TO PREVENT OUTBREAK OF SEASONAL INFECTIONS?

School administrators can provide leadership for the development and implementation of general prevention practices that will reduce the risk of transmission of seasonal infections in the workplace. Educate staff on infection prevention and control measures and what to do in case of illness including:

- Encourage proper hand hygiene.
 - Provide an adequate supply of liquid soap and paper towels.
 - Provide safe access to alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Provide an adequate supply of gloves for contact with body fluids; educate staff on glove use, removal and selection.
- Provide personal protective equipment for staff as required.
- Ensure that environmental cleaning procedures are adequate, especially for high touch surfaces.
- Occupationally acquired infections in workers that result from workplace exposures are occupational infections that must be reported to the Ontario Ministry of Labour and Workplace Safety & Insurance Board.
- Inform the joint health and safety committee of outbreaks affecting staff.
- Advise staff to stay home when sick.

ADDITIONAL PRECAUTIONS TO PREVENT THE TRANSMISSION OF SEASONAL INFECTIONS IN SCHOOLS MAY INCLUDE:

- Encourage students and their families to receive annual vaccination.
- Educate students and parents on what to do in case of infections.
- Isolate ill children from others in a quiet room and notify parents/caregiver to pick up the child as soon as possible.
- Advise students to stay home from school when sick.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MYSELF AND OTHERS FROM RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS?

- Perform frequent hand hygiene using soap and water for 15 seconds and/or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (when hands are not visibly soiled).
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue if you cough or sneeze and discard the tissue in a waste receptacle.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Get an annual flu shot. If you do become ill with flu-like symptoms, discuss antiviral treatment with your physician.
- If you have the flu, limit your contact with others and stay home from work for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people. If this is not possible maintain a distance of at least two meters from someone who is coughing and sneezing.



- Avoid touching your nose, mouth and eyes when others around you are sick.
- Immediately and thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces (e.g. after someone has vomited).
- Immediately remove and wash clothing contaminated with vomit or feces.
- Stay home from school if you are ill, avoid contact with others and do not prepare food for others.
- Visit your doctor if symptoms do not improve.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MYSELF AND OTHERS FROM GASTROINTESTINAL ILLNESS?

- Perform frequent hand hygiene especially after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and preparing or eating food.
- Do not eat undercooked shellfish and meats.
- Wash fruit and vegetables before eating.
- Immediately and thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces (e.g. after someone has vomited).
- Immediately remove and wash clothing contaminated with vomit or feces.
- Clean bathrooms thoroughly using appropriate cleaning products.
- Stay home from school if you are ill with vomiting and/or diarrhea for at least 24-48 hours after symptoms have stopped.
- Do not prepare food for others if you have vomiting and/or diarrhea.

WHERE DO I FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT SEASONAL INFECTIONS?

Call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.

Health Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/flu-influenza.html>

Refer to the Center for Disease Control websites: <http://www.cdc.gov/lu/school/guidance.htm>

Check the PSHSA website www.pshsa.ca for additional information.