

# **INFLUENZA PREVENTION FACT SHEET FOR SCHOOLS**

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## **FLU IN GEORGIA**

Each year, about 10-20% of the people in Georgia get influenza, sometimes called “the flu.” This means as many as 1.6 million Georgians may be infected by the flu this year. Flu activity is always highest during the winter months. There are things you can do to prevent flu illness.

### **What is the flu?**

Influenza, or flu, is a common and highly contagious viral infection of the nose, throat, and lungs. It can be one of the most severe illnesses of the winter season. Common symptoms include fever, headache, muscle aches, extreme fatigue, runny nose, congestion, and cough. Nausea, vomiting, and ear infections may also be common, especially in children. Young, healthy people usually recover quickly from influenza without problems, but especially in high-risk groups, influenza may lead to severe illness, hospitalization and even death. People aged 65 years and older, children aged less than 2 years, women more than 3 months pregnant during flu season, and people with underlying chronic conditions (e.g.: asthma or other lung disease, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, blood disease or immune disorders) are at highest risk for complications.

### **How does a person get the flu?**

The flu usually spreads from person to person when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks and the virus is sent into the air. You may also get the flu by touching a recently contaminated surface (such as a doorknob, telephone, faucet, or computer keyboard) and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. A person with the flu may be contagious 24 hours before he/she develops symptoms and during the 7 days after onset of symptoms and possibly longer in children.

### **How can I avoid catching the flu?**

Vaccination is the best protection against the flu. Flu and other viral illnesses can also be prevented by covering coughs and sneezes, frequent handwashing, and keeping your hands away from your eyes, nose, and mouth.

### **Who should get the flu vaccine?**

There are 2 types of flu vaccine. One is a flu shot and the other is a nasal-spray flu vaccine. This year, the flu shot is recommended for people aged 65 years and older, children aged 6-23 months, women more than 3 months pregnant during flu season, and for people between 2 and 64 years with underlying chronic conditions. Household contacts, health care workers, and other caregivers, that have close contact with people at high risk for complications of the flu are also recommended to receive the vaccine. Healthy persons 5 through 49 years of age may consider the nasal-spray flu vaccine to protect themselves and those around them. Protection develops 2 weeks after receiving the vaccine.

### **What is the treatment for the flu?**

Most young, healthy people who catch the flu will recover in a few days without specific treatment, although dry cough and fatigue may persist. Bed rest, plenty of fluids, a pain and/or fever reliever such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, decongestants, cough suppressants, and a humidifier can provide symptomatic relief. Aspirin should NOT be used for influenza treatment in children. High-risk persons should also consult with a physician early in the illness to ask about specific medications that may shorten the duration or severity of illness if given within 48 hours of symptom onset. Antibiotics, which treat bacterial infections, do not work against viral illness like the flu, and do not prevent complications.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ A sick child is advised to remain at home during the first days of illness when symptoms are most severe and the infection is most contagious. A child can return to school when symptoms are improving and he/she has had no fever for at least 24 hours.
- ✓ Some schools experiencing high rates of absenteeism among students and staff have made the administrative decision to close temporarily. It is not known if school closings are an effective influenza control measure. If necessary because of high absenteeism, the decision to temporarily close a school should be made by school officials and local public health authorities. Please note: Clusters of illness are reportable to public health authorities. If you notice an unusually high number of ill students and/or staff, please contact local public health authorities.
- ✓ Vaccination is recommended for high-risk persons, their contacts, and should be considered for others who wish to avoid the flu, if available. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently recommends flu vaccine for people aged 65 years and older, children aged 6-23 months, women more than 3 months pregnant during flu season, and for people between 2 and 64 years with underlying chronic conditions. Household contacts and healthcare workers that have close contact with people at high risk for complications of the flu are also recommended to receive vaccine. Healthy persons 5 through 49 years of age may consider the nasal-spray flu vaccine to protect themselves and those around them. Protection develops 2 weeks after receiving the vaccine. Although vaccination just before the flu season is best, the flu season can last weeks or even months, so vaccination during the season is better than not being vaccinated at all.
- ✓ Remind everyone, including students, faculty, and staff:
  - Wash your hands! We encourage schools to work with the local PTA to make tissues, soap and water, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer available in classrooms and bathrooms.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
  - Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, or cough and sneeze into your elbow. If you do cough and sneeze into your hand, wash your hands!
  - Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, including doorknobs, telephones, and faucets on a regular basis.

Please contact your healthcare provider or local health department if you have any questions.

More information on Influenza and Influenza Vaccine can be found at:

- Georgia Immunization Program - <http://health.state.ga.us/programs/immunization/flu.shtml>
- Georgia Influenza Surveillance - <http://health.state.ga.us/epi/flu/>
- CDC Influenza Website - <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>
- CDC Influenza Surveillance - <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/fluactivity.htm>

Additional educational materials are available from:

- Georgia United Against Antibiotic Resistant Disease (GUARD) - <http://www.guard-ga.org>

