



Schools and Childcare Centers

Guidance for Identifying, Reporting, Preventing, and Controlling Respiratory Illness Outbreaks

These guidelines are intended to help schools and childcare facilities in respiratory illness outbreaks.

What is a respiratory illness outbreak?

Respiratory illness is defined as: temperature of $>100.4^{\circ}$ F with a cough and/or sore throat

Respiratory illness outbreak is defined as: 20% or more of students or staff within a shared setting of more than five people (i.e., classroom, sports team, or other group) absent or sent home due to a respiratory illness within a 72-hour period.

When to report to public health

If your school or childcare meets the respiratory illness outbreak definition, then report to your local health department.

Each time a new outbreak is identified, initial reporting of the outbreak is required. Do not submit additional reports on subsequent days of the same outbreak. Report a new outbreak if a new respiratory illness is identified or the respiratory illness identified once again meets the criteria for a respiratory illness outbreak described above.

When is an outbreak considered over?

Outbreaks may be considered over when the respiratory illness identified decreases below the 20% criteria listed above and no new cases have been identified for 10 consecutive days.

Special circumstances

If an unusual or atypical situation arises (e.g., severe illness, multiple hospitalizations, large wide-spread outbreaks), contact the regional health department.

Monitoring and testing

Determining which type of respiratory illness (Influenza, COVID-19, RSV, or other) an individual may have is difficult based on symptoms alone. Therefore, if multiple people (students or staff) are noted to have similar symptoms of respiratory illness, testing is recommended to determine the cause of illness.

How to report to public health

School and childcares can notify their regional health department by phone or submit the reporting worksheet to your regional health department. The worksheet and regional contact information can be found by visiting dph.sc.gov/sites/scdph/files/Library/D-3965.pdf.

Outbreak control measures

Core prevention strategies:

- Stay up to date with immunizations
- Practice good respiratory hygiene (i.e., cover your cough or sneeze and wash hands often)
- Stay home and away from others when sick
- Improve airflow and ventilation
- Clean high touch surfaces regularly

Additional prevention strategies

- Masks
- Physical distancing
- Testing for respiratory viruses

Resources

cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/guidance/respiratory-virus-guidance.html

dph.sc.gov/health-wellness/child-teen-health/school-exclusion