



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Mount Rogers Health District

201 Francis Marion Lane
Marion, VA 24354

January 5, 2015

Dear Parent/Caregiver and Staff:

As you may be aware, influenza activity is widespread in Virginia and is affecting our community. In Mount Rogers Health District, we have been notified that children have become sick with influenza (the "flu") and/or influenza-like illnesses. Some children who have become sick did receive a flu vaccine this year.

The flu vaccine contains 3-4 different strains of the influenza virus, depending on which form of the vaccine is received, and remains the best way to protect someone from the flu. The influenza virus has the ability to change such that sometimes a strain can circulate in the community that does not exactly match the strains that are in the vaccine. That has happened this year with one of the strains in the vaccine. The flu vaccine may still offer some protection from that strain of influenza, should still protect against the other strains in the vaccine, and can prevent complications or severe illness in someone who gets sick with the flu.

Influenza is a virus that can live in a person's respiratory tract. Thus, flu is usually spread via direct contact with an infected person who is sneezing and coughing, or from contact with hands or objects/surfaces contaminated with nose and throat secretions from an infected person.

We recommend the following infection control measures to prevent the spread of flu in the school population:

- **Encourage good hygienic practices:**
 - Wash hands often, especially when exposed to someone who is sick or when touching objects or surfaces that may be contaminated.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when coughing or sneezing or use your inner arm (elbow crease), but do not use your hands.
 - Dispose of facial tissues that contain nasal secretions after each use. Wash hands afterwards.
 - Avoid touching the eyes, nose, or mouth.
 - Routinely clean commonly touched surfaces, toys, and other shared objects as recommended.
- **Stay home if ill**
 - Individuals should stay home from school, work and errands when sick and avoid close contact with people who are sick.
 - Ill students or staff should remain home until they are **fever-free for a full 24 hours**, without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- **Encourage vaccination**
 - The single best way to protect against flu is to get vaccinated each year.
 - Influenza vaccination is usually 70-90% effective in preventing the flu in healthy persons.
 - Receiving flu vaccine later in the season can still provide important protection since flu viruses can circulate as late as May.
 - Most individuals will be protected against influenza within 2 weeks after vaccination.
- **Antiviral medications**
 - These may also be used to prevent or treat the flu - talk to your healthcare provider for more information.



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- **Enhance influenza awareness**
 - Please see the enclosed fact sheet on influenza.

In addition to influenza, some gastrointestinal illnesses that cause vomiting and diarrhea are also circulating in the community. The most common cause of gastrointestinal illness in the school setting is norovirus, which causes illness that usually lasts one to three days. Norovirus can be spread by consuming contaminated food or liquids, touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching one's mouth, or having direct contact with another person who is infected and then touching one's mouth.

We recommend the following infection control measures to prevent the spread of norovirus in the school population:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water, especially after using the restroom.
- Routinely clean commonly touched surfaces, toys, and other shared objects with household chlorine bleach-based cleaners.
- Children and staff who are ill with diarrheal symptoms should be kept home and excluded from school and/or other group activities while they have diarrhea or vomiting and for **24 hours after the illness ends** to avoid spreading the illness to others.

If you have any questions about influenza or gastrointestinal illnesses, please contact your child's doctor or the Washington County Health Department at 276-676-5604.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melody Counts MD".

Melody Counts, M.D., M.H.M.
Interim Health Director
Mount Rogers Health District