



Catherine E. Heigel, Director

*Promoting and protecting the health of the public and the environment*

*October 21, 2015*

Dear Childcare Provider,

The annual influenza (flu) season is about to start. This letter provides important information regarding flu signs and symptoms, flu prevention measures and flu outbreaks. This information can be used in childcare centers to help prevent the spread of flu and keep children healthy during this flu season.

Based on estimates that approximately 20,000 children younger than 5 years of age are hospitalized each year for influenza complications, influenza can significantly impact young children. And, in fact, influenza causes more hospitalizations among young children than any other vaccine-preventable disease.

Flu can cause symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches and vomiting. Flu can be very serious and may even cause death in some individuals with chronic health conditions, young children, pregnant women, or elderly persons.

Flu spreads between individuals when those sick with flu cough, sneeze, or even talk. The flu virus can spread to people up to six feet away. Flu can also spread when people touch their faces or eyes after touching something a sick person has touched.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older get the flu vaccine as soon as possible, unless they have a medical reason not to be vaccinated.

Additional recommendations to prevent the spread of flu include:

- Wash hands often for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water.
- If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue, or into your upper sleeve or elbow, rather than your hands.
- Stay home if you have flu symptoms so you will not infect others. Children and staff can return to childcare when they no longer have a fever without the use of fever-reducing medicine.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects. See the following web link for more information: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/cleaning.htm>

When flu occurs in a childcare center, it may spread rapidly within this group setting. Consult your regional health department for steps to take to reduce disease spread. Proper prevention and control measures are very important in limiting spread to others at home and in the community. Staff and attendees can introduce or re-introduce influenza into childcare settings, so outbreaks can be prolonged or occur more than once during flu season.

Flu outbreaks are reportable to South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control and should be called into the Regional Public Health Office covering the county where a childcare center is located. Because of this, it is necessary for childcare centers to monitor for increases in flu and flu-like illness.

Tips to monitor flu in childcare centers:

- Maintain heightened awareness for all febrile respiratory illness among staff and attendees.
- Center management should immediately contact their Regional Public Health Office if an increase in flu-like illness is observed. Regional Public Health Office telephone numbers are listed below and can be found at the following web link: <http://www.scdhec.gov/library/CR-009025.pdf>
- Keep a log of ill individuals and their symptoms and review it with the Regional Public Health Office.
- The Regional Public Health Office can offer guidance regarding whether laboratory testing is needed and how long to continue heightened awareness.

<b>Regional Public Health Offices</b>			
Lowcountry	Midlands	Pee Dee	Upstate
<b>Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester</b> Phone: (843) 953-0043 Nights/Weekends: (843) 441-1091	<b>Kershaw, Lexington, Newberry, Richland</b> Phone: (803) 576-2749 Nights/Weekends: (888) 801-1046	<b>Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Marlboro, Marion</b> Phone: (843) 661-4830 Nights/Weekends: (843) 915-8845	<b>Anderson, Oconee</b> Phone: (864) 260-5801 Nights/Weekends: (866) 298-4442
<b>Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton, Jasper</b> Phone: (843) 322-2453 Nights/Weekends: (843) 441-1091	<b>Chester, Fairfield, Lancaster, York</b> Phone: (803) 286-9948 Nights/Weekends: (888) 801-1046	<b>Clarendon, Lee, Sumter</b> Phone: (803) 773-5511 Nights/Weekends: (843) 915-8845	<b>Abbeville, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick</b> Phone: (864) 227-5947 Nights/Weekends: (866) 298-4442
<b>Allendale, Bamberg, Calhoun, Orangeburg</b> Phone: (803) 943-3878 Nights/Weekends: (843) 441-1091	<b>Aiken, Barnwell, Edgefield, Saluda</b> Phone: (803) 642-1618 Nights/Weekends: (888) 801-1046	<b>Georgetown, Horry, Williamsburg</b> Phone: (843) 915-8804 Nights/Weekends: (843) 915-8845	<b>Cherokee, Greenville, Pickens, Spartanburg, Union</b> Phone: (864) 372-3133 Nights/Weekends: (866) 298-4442

Additional prevention and control information about flu is available at the following websites:

- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/cleaning.htm>
- <http://www.dhec.sc.gov/flu>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/>

Thank you for your cooperation and assistance with this important public health activity.

Sincerely,

Linda J. Bell, M.D.  
 State Epidemiologist