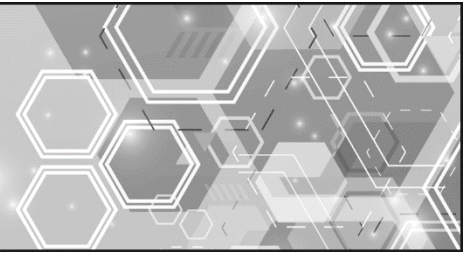




Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Respiratory Illness in Schools

What is respiratory illness?

Respiratory illness refers to infections that affect the nose, throat, and lungs. These illnesses are commonly caused by viruses such as influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), COVID-19, etc. Symptoms may include cough, fever, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose/congestion, headache and difficulty breathing. Respiratory viruses spread easily through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, or breathes, and by touching the eyes, nose, or mouth with contaminated hands/items.

How to stop the spread of respiratory illness in schools?

- Stay home when sick. Do not return to school until fever free and symptoms improving for at least 24 hours (or 48 hours if vomiting/diarrhea occurred)
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Keep hands clean
- Do not share food and drinks
- Schools should notify parents/guardians as soon as their child is ill, keep the child isolated from others and supervised until pick up. Staff and students may consider wearing a mask until they leave
- Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfection of common areas and high-touch surfaces such as doorknobs, handrails, washrooms, faucet handles, computer keyboards/mouse, desktops, shared student materials, toys, gym equipment, school buses, etc.
- Discourage the use of shared items, sensory bins/activities
- Postpone events, performances and celebrations that involve bringing in family members and visitors
- Postpone student field trips and activities including assemblies, overnight trips, crowded indoor venues, visits to settings with vulnerable populations (e.g., long-term care homes, retirement homes)

How to practise effective hand hygiene?

- Encourage frequent hand washing by all students and staff
- Hand washing is the preferred method of hand hygiene in schools, and when hands are visibly dirty. Scrub with liquid soap and warm water for at least 15 seconds. Do not use shared towels to dry hands.

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- Provide 70-90% alcohol-based hand sanitizer as another option for keeping hands clean
- Hand sanitizer should NOT be used if hands are visibly dirty
- Wash hands AFTER the following: toileting, touching contaminated surfaces, sensory/group play
- Wash hands BEFORE and AFTER: eating, preparing food, and caring for a sick child

How to effectively clean and disinfect surfaces?

- Cleaning and disinfection are two separate steps:
 - Step 1-Cleaning. Physically removes organic material using soap, water and friction
 - Step 2 -Disinfection. Kills microorganisms using chemical products and specific contact time
- Read disinfectant product labels and follow the manufacturer's instructions:
 - Verify the disinfectant has a DIN (Drug Identification Number). If a bleach solution is permitted for use in the school, a DIN number is not required
 - Disinfectant products that can both “clean” and “disinfect” are recommended
 - Disinfectants that are “ready to use” are recommended. Alternatively, if products are concentrated and require dilution, follow the instructions on how to dilute prior to use. It is important to use disinfectants at their intended concentration
 - Ensure disinfectants are effective by maintaining the manufacturer specified **contact time**; the minimum time the surface must remain wet after the disinfectant is applied. After the contact time is reached, wipe dry with a single-use paper towel or allow to air dry.
 - Ensure disinfectant products are not expired
- Follow correct cleaning technique such as cleaning from cleaner areas to dirty and from high surfaces to low (e.g., in a washroom, clean mirrors first and toilets last)
- Change cleaning cloths and mop heads frequently and launder/discard between uses
- Do not double-dip cleaning cloths into a bucket of cleaning/disinfectant solution
- Use personal protective equipment (PPE) as directed by manufacturer’s instructions and in accordance occupational health and safety policies.

Additional measures

- School administrators should monitor for higher-than-expected absenteeism
- Educate staff, students and parents/guardians on signs and symptoms and to report symptoms
- Report to public health when respiratory illness levels reach 30% in a particular classroom, cohort (e.g. Full day kindergarten, primary, intermediate students) or in general across the student population

How long should ill staff and students be excluded?

Individuals with respiratory symptoms should not return to school until fever free and symptoms improving for at least 24 hours (or 48hrs if vomiting/diarrhea occurred). A lingering cough may be acceptable if the cough is not new or worsening. Seek medical attention if symptoms worsen.

June 16, 2026