

State of New Hampshire

School and Childcare Toolkit for Respiratory and Gastrointestinal Illness



Department of
**HEALTH &
HUMAN SERVICES**

Division of
Public Health



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Introduction

Purpose

This document outlines guidance from the New Hampshire (NH) Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Public Health (DPH) on reporting and managing respiratory and gastrointestinal illness in schools, childcare settings, and camps. It also includes tools that school nurses or administrative staff can use to share important health information with children, staff, and families.

School-aged children often develop respiratory and gastrointestinal (GI) infections, such as colds, RSV, flu, COVID-19, and norovirus. Their immune systems are still developing, and they often spend time with other children, which contributes to the spread of illness.

Because kids spend so much time at school or in childcare, it's important to take steps to stop illness from spreading in these settings. Fortunately, there are simple actions that can help keep children and staff healthy while reducing missed school days and healthcare visits.

Everyone in school and childcare settings can stay healthy by taking actions like preparing food safely, cleaning regularly, washing hands often, and reporting illnesses. Parents and guardians can play a part by keeping sick children home so they can get better and avoid spreading the illness to others.

Managing Illnesses

When a child is sick, it's not always clear what illness they have. That's why it's important to understand and watch for certain symptoms.

Know the Symptoms

- Many different respiratory virus infections have common symptoms, which may include a fever [a temperature over 100.4°F (38°C) orally, above 102°F (38.9°C) rectally, or above 100°F (37.8°C) under the arm], cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, and feeling very tired. Some people may vomit or have diarrhea, although these are not common symptoms of respiratory infections.
- Gastrointestinal illness, sometimes called a "stomach bug", usually causes vomiting, diarrhea, or both. Stomach cramping and nausea are common. Fever [a temperature over 100.4°F (38°C) orally, above 102°F (38.9°C) rectally, or above 100°F (37.8°C) under the arm] might occur, but not always.

Keep Sick Children and Staff Home

If someone has symptoms (noted above), they should stay home as their illness could prevent them from effectively participating in school or childcare activities, and they could make other people sick.

Children or staff should **stay home** if the following are present:

- Fever [a temperature over 100.4°F (38°C) orally, above 102°F (38.9°C) rectally, or above 100°F (37.8°C) under the arm].
- Vomiting more than twice in the previous 24 hours.
- Diarrhea causing 'accidents,' is bloody, or more than two bowel movements above what a child or adult normally experiences in a 24-hour period.
- Respiratory virus symptoms (noted above) are worsening or not improving and are not better explained by another cause, such as seasonal allergies.

Return to School or Childcare Considerations

Children and staff are best prepared to return to school or childcare when:

- At least 24 hours have passed since the last signs or symptoms of a fever **without** the use of fever-reducing medicine like ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, etc.) or acetaminophen (Tylenol).
- Respiratory symptoms are getting better for at least 24 hours, even if there is no fever or the fever has already resolved.
- Vomiting has resolved overnight, and the child or staff member can hold down food and liquids.
- Diarrhea has improved, the person is no longer having accidents and is able to control their bowels, and the person is not having more than two bowel movements above what they normally have during a 24-hour period (even if the stool remains loose).
- The person is well enough to participate in their daily activities.

Track Illnesses

If there are many sick people in your school or childcare facility, it can help to use a “case definition” to understand the extent of the problem and inform next steps. A case definition also allows DPH staff to determine how many individuals have a similar illness, confirm if an outbreak is occurring, and know when an outbreak ends and returns to an expected level. Schools and childcare facilities can use the two case definition examples below.

Children and staff should consult their healthcare provider if there are questions about when they should return to school or childcare activities.

Respiratory Illness Case Definition

Count any person who is absent and reports at least two of the following symptoms: muscle aches, headache, chills, fatigue, sore throat, sneezing, dry or productive cough, runny nose, loss of taste or smell, nausea accompanied by vomiting or diarrhea, and fever [a temperature above 100.4°F (38°C) orally, above 102°F (38.9°C) rectally, or above 100°F (37.8°C) under the arm].

Gastrointestinal Illness Case Definition

Count any person who is absent and reports loose or watery stools, especially if it occurs three or more times a day.

Outbreak Response



There are many ways to help decrease the spread of respiratory and GI illnesses. Schools and childcare facilities are encouraged to recognize and report potential outbreaks or clusters of illness and collaborate with a DPH staff member to respond and prevent additional spread.

A cluster is an unusual or larger than expected number of illnesses in a particular area or group of people over a period of time. When a Division of Public Health staff member investigates and finds a link between people suggesting person-to-person spread, the cluster is called an outbreak.

Recognize

Recognize that a cluster of illness or potential outbreak may be occurring when you observe an increase in child or staff illness above what is normally expected. Monitoring child absenteeism on a daily or weekly basis is a helpful tool to see early signs that a cluster of illness or a potential outbreak of respiratory or stomach (GI) illness may be occurring.

New Hampshire DPH collects and monitors weekly student absenteeism data. To report school absenteeism, visit the [Infectious Disease Resources for Schools, Educators, Child Care Partners and Camps](#) webpage on the DHHS website and locate the link for weekly absenteeism reporting. You can also go directly to the [New Hampshire School Absenteeism Report Form](#).

Report

Report increases in illness, including any clusters or potential outbreaks, to New Hampshire DPH. Under New Hampshire State law ([RSA 141-C](#)), many different types of infections are reportable to DPH. State law also requires that any suspect outbreak, cluster of illness, or unusual occurrence of disease which may harm the public's health is reported to DPH **within 24 hours of detection**. A list of reportable infectious diseases can be found on the [Department of Health and Human Services website](#).

To report an illness or suspected outbreak, contact DPH by phone or online.

To Report by Phone:

- During normal business hours, call [603-271-4496](tel:603-271-4496).
- After hours or during weekends, call [603-271-5300](tel:603-271-5300), and request to speak with the DPH staff member on call. This staff member will call you back.

To Report Online:

Use the [Public Outbreak Report Form](#). You can fill the form out at any time, day or night.

Business Hours	After Hours
Monday to Friday • 8:00am - 4:00pm Phone Number: 603-271-4496 General Fax Number: 603-696-3017	Evening and Nights • 4:00pm - 8:00am, Monday to Friday Weekends and Holidays • Phone Number: 603-271-5300 • Ask for the on-call DPH staff member
Public Outbreak Report Form	Infectious Disease Reporting and Forms

When reporting respiratory or GI illnesses, it's important to choose one main contact person, such as a school nurse, principal, or administrative staff member. This person will help collect, report, and share information and pass along recommendations from New Hampshire DPH to other school staff and administrators.

For online reporting, once the form is submitted you'll get an automatic email confirming receipt and with resources to help reduce the spread of illness. A DPH staff member will review the information and contact you if they have additional questions or if you request assistance. Only submit one report per cluster or outbreak. Once a DPH staff member has been assigned to an outbreak event, they will provide information on the best way to report additional illnesses.

If your facility is experiencing illness that does not fit the respiratory or gastrointestinal categories, please report it by phone **within 24 hours of detection**.



Collaborate

Collaborate with a DPH staff member who will work with you to determine if an outbreak is occurring and help to stop the spread of illness. If there is an outbreak, an assigned DPH staff member will work closely with your identified lead contact to help stop the illness from spreading.

This can be accomplished by:

- Establishing methods to identify and count people who are sick,
- Making sure case definitions and exclusion dates are clear and up to date, and
- Coordinating the sharing of information between your facility and DPH.

New Hampshire Division of Public Health staff will request additional information during the outbreak, including:

1. The total number of children who attend the school or childcare facility.
 - a. The number of children who were sick during the outbreak.
 - b. The number of children with current respiratory or GI symptoms.
2. The total number of staff who work at the school or childcare facility.
 - a. The number of staff who were sick during the outbreak.
 - b. The number of sick staff with current respiratory or GI symptoms.
 - c. Any additional occupation details which are important (i.e. if staff are food service workers).
3. The date the first recognized child or staff member got sick.
4. Any symptoms children or staff are experiencing.
5. Any hospitalizations of children or staff occurred (if any).
6. Any deaths of children or staff occurred (if any).
7. Any potential patterns of illness, such as certain classrooms impacted, or information about recent group events, such as class parties or school-wide events.

DPH staff will request only the minimum information necessary to evaluate the outbreak and inform any recommendations to stop the spread of illness.



Respond

Respond by implementing appropriate recommendations outlined in the CDC's [Preventing Spread of Infections in K-12 Schools](#) and the [Website and Resources](#) section below.

This includes:

1. Updating DPH staff on the number of new people who get sick and may be associated with the cluster or outbreak.
2. Informing ill children and staff to stay home until they feel well enough to return to school or childcare activities.
3. Teaching children and staff about ways to prevent illness, like handwashing, not sharing personal items, cleaning regularly, and staying home when sick.
4. Providing recommendations for safe food service practices and food preparation.
5. Implementing routine cleaning and disinfection.
6. Keeping staff and parents informed. DPH recommends that schools and childcare facilities work with a DPH staff member to create messages and information for staff, children, and families. This ensures coordinated communication and an accurate description of the situation, risk, and recommendations. There are example letters for parents and guardians in [Appendix A](#) and [Appendix B](#) of this toolkit.
7. Working with a DPH staff member to keep track of how the outbreak is changing, discuss tailored ways to reduce the spread of illness, and determine when the outbreak is over.

Websites And Resources

Please note the information and links can change often.

Respiratory Illness

- [Respiratory Illnesses | Respiratory Illnesses | CDC](#)
- [How to Protect Yourself and Others | COVID-19 | CDC](#)
- [Parents: Help Children Fight Flu | Influenza \(Flu\) | CDC](#)
- [Healthy Habits to Prevent Flu | Influenza \(Flu\) | CDC](#)
- [Flu Resource Center | Flu Resource Center | CDC](#)

Gastrointestinal Illness

- [How to Prevent Norovirus | Norovirus | CDC](#)
- [Preventing Norovirus at Youth Camps | Norovirus | CDC](#)
- [Clean Up After Someone with Norovirus Vomits or has Diarrhea](#) (YouTube)

Childcare and Education

- [Preventing Spread of Infections in K-12 Schools | CDC](#)
- [When Students or Staff are Sick | CDC](#)
- [Preventing Infectious Diseases | Early Care and Education Portal | CDC](#)
- [Protecting Against COVID-19 and Other Infections in Early Care and Education Programs | Early Care and Education Portal | CDC](#)

Adolescent and School Health

- [School Preparedness | CDC](#)

Handwashing

- [About Handwashing | Clean Hands | CDC](#)

Appendix A

Example Letter (Respiratory Illness)

Dear Parents or Guardians:

We want to inform you that an increasing number of children at our [name of school or childcare facility] have recently become ill with respiratory illnesses. We're asking for your help to prevent further spread of illness. Here are a few important things you can do.

Know the symptoms:

- Many different respiratory virus infections have common symptoms, which may include a fever (a temperature over 100.4° F), cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, and feeling very tired. Some people may also vomit or have diarrhea.

Keep sick children at home until:

- At least 24 hours have passed since the last signs or symptoms of a fever without using fever-reducing medicine like ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, etc.) or acetaminophen (Tylenol).
- Their respiratory symptoms are getting better for at least 24 hours, even if there is no fever or fever has already gone away.
- Vomiting has resolved overnight, and your child can hold down food and liquids.
- Diarrhea has improved, your child is no longer having accidents and is able to control their bowel movements, and your child is not having more than two bowel movements above what they normally have during a 24-hour period (even if the stool remains loose).

Report your child's absence to the school or childcare facility:

- If your child is out sick, please let [name of nurse, or school or childcare administrator] know.
- When reporting the absence, let us know what your child's symptoms are, so we can keep track of the types of illnesses that are spreading.

Help your child prevent the spread of illnesses:

- Practice frequent handwashing with soap and water, which is the best way to reduce the spread of germs.
- Remind children to cover their coughs and sneezes with a tissue or their elbow.
- Ask your child not to share personal items, like food or water bottles, with others.

If you have any questions or need more information, please contact [name of the school nurse or facility administrator]. We will notify you of any changes in our plan to prevent respiratory illnesses.

Sincerely,

[School or Childcare Administrator Name and Signature]

Appendix B

Example Letter (GI Illness)

Dear Parents or Guardians:

We want to inform you that an increasing number of children at [name of school or childcare facility] are getting sick with gastrointestinal (GI) illnesses. We're asking for your help to prevent further spread of illness. Here are a few important things you can do.

Know the symptoms.

- Gastrointestinal illness, sometimes called the "stomach bug," usually causes vomiting, diarrhea, or both. Stomach cramping and nausea are also common. Fever (a temperature over 100.4° F) might occur, but not always.

Keep sick children at home until:

- Vomiting has resolved overnight, and your child can hold down food and liquids.
- Diarrhea has improved, your child is no longer having accidents and is able to control their bowel movements, and your child is not having more than two bowel movements above what they normally have during a 24-hour period (even if the stool remains loose).
- At least 24 hours after the last signs of a fever without using fever-reducing medicine like ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, etc.) or acetaminophen (Tylenol).

Report your child's absence to the school or childcare facility.

- If your child is out sick, please let [name of nurse, or school or childcare administrator] know.
- When reporting the absence, let the facility know what your child's symptoms are, so we can keep track of the types of illnesses that are spreading.

Help your child prevent the spread of illnesses:

- Practice frequent handwashing with soap and water, which is the best way to reduce the spread of germs.
- Ask your child not to share personal items, like food or water bottles, with others.

If you have any questions or need more information, please contact [name of the school nurse or facility administrator]. We will notify you of any changes in our plan to prevent GI illnesses.

Sincerely,

[School or Childcare Administrator Name and Signature]