

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



Rick Scott
Governor

Celeste Philip, MD, MPH
Surgeon General and Secretary

Vision: To be the **Healthiest State** in the Nation

January 17, 2018

Dear Principal or Administrator:

Influenza or 'flu' activity is high across the state and the nation (including in children) and has continued to increase in recent weeks. Influenza regularly spreads more quickly among children than in all other age groups due to their close contact with one another and hygiene habits. So far this season, 23 outbreaks have been reported to the Florida Department of Health in facilities serving children. There has also been a total of 107 outbreaks of influenza and influenza-like illness reported. This is more outbreaks than reported at this time in previous seasons, which is an indication of a more severe flu season.

The single best way to protect against seasonal flu and its potentially severe complications for children is to have them get a seasonal influenza vaccine each year. **We are recommending you please have teachers and staff get vaccinated and send a letter home to parents encouraging vaccination and to keep sick children home (draft provided). Sadly, two influenza-associated pediatric deaths have been reported so far this season in Florida.** During the 2016-17 influenza season, 10 influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported. All of these deaths occurred in children that were not vaccinated.

People infected with influenza are most infectious to others early in the course of their illness (within the first one to three days after symptoms begin). This means **it is important to review school illness exclusion policies with staff, teachers, and parents to ensure children sick with flu are rapidly identified and excluded and to ensure parents keep children home when they are sick.** Symptoms of the flu often include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headaches, or fatigue.

The flu vaccine is safe, and continues to be the best way to protect your students, staff, and their families from the flu. Of note, the national Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) does not recommend the use of the live attenuated influenza vaccine (i.e., the nasal vaccine) during the 2017-18 season. **The ACIP continues to recommend annual influenza vaccination for everyone aged six months and older.**

The Department urges schools to help fight the spread of influenza by:

- **Sending a letter to parents encouraging influenza vaccination;**
 - Example provided on our website: <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/influenza/flu-resources.html>, as well as, "The Flu: A Guide for Parents" fact sheet found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/updated/fluguideforparents.pdf>
 - Parents and staff can check with their physician, your local health department or visit <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/prevention/flu-prevention/locate-a-flu-shot.html> to search for a flu vaccine location.
- **Encouraging teachers and staff to get vaccinated;**
- **Ensuring rapid identification of sick students, teachers, and staff and ensuring they stay home when they are sick;**
- **Encouraging good respiratory etiquette; and**

- Students, teachers and staff should cover their noses and mouths with tissue when they cough or sneeze.
- Students, teachers and staff should wash their hands often using soap and warm water; and
- Encouraging students, teachers, and staff to avoid touching their eyes, nose, or mouth.
- **Cleaning and disinfecting commonly handled surfaces or objects at least daily.**

For more information on preventing the flu, as well as, specific materials and tools for schools, please visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/>. Please contact your local county health department with any questions and report any suspected influenza outbreaks to your county health department right away (www.floridahealth.gov/CHDEpiContact). Thank you for your important contribution to protecting the health of those in the community you serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carina Blackmore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Carina" and last name "Blackmore" clearly distinguishable.

Carina Blackmore, DVM, PhD, Dipl ACVPM
Director, Division of Disease Control & Health
Protection
State Epidemiologist