

# INFLUENZA PREVENTION FACT SHEET FOR SCHOOLS

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## FLU IN GEORGIA

Each year, about 10-20% of the people in Georgia get influenza, sometimes called “the flu.” This means as many as 1.6 million Georgians may be infected by the flu this year. Flu activity is always highest during the winter months. There are things you can do to prevent flu illness.

## FLU FACTS

### What is the flu?

Influenza, or flu, is a common and highly contagious viral infection of the nose, throat, and lungs. It is one of the most severe illnesses of the winter season. Common symptoms include fever, headache, muscle aches, chills, runny nose, congestion, and cough. Young, healthy people usually recover from influenza without problems, but influenza may lead to severe illness and life-threatening hospitalizations. Those aged 65 years and older, those under the age of 2 years, those with weakened immune systems, including those receiving chemotherapy, and those with a chronic medical condition are at highest risk for serious complications. Chronic medical conditions include: asthma, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, and sickle cell anemia.

### How does a person get the flu?

The flu usually spreads from person to person when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks and the virus is sent into the air. You may also get the influenza virus by touching a recently contaminated surface (such as a doorknob or computer keyboard) and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. A person with the flu is most infectious 24 hours before he/she develops symptoms and during the 3-7 days after onset of symptoms.

### How can I avoid catching the flu?

Vaccination is the best protection against the flu. Flu and other viral illnesses can also be prevented by covering coughs and sneezes, frequent handwashing, and keeping your hands away from your eyes, nose, and mouth.

### Who should get a flu shot?

Vaccine is recommended for anyone with a chronic medical condition or a weakened immune system, people aged 50 years and older, children aged 6-24 months, and women more than 3 months pregnant during flu season. Vaccine should also be considered for anyone who wants to prevent the flu. Children under the age of 9 years receiving the flu vaccine for the first time require two shots one month apart. Protection develops 2 weeks after receiving the flu shot.

### What is the treatment for the flu?

There are medications that shorten the duration of illness. These medications must be started within 48 hours after the onset of symptoms and are obtained by prescription only. Aside from these medications, bed rest, plenty of fluids, a pain and/or fever reliever, decongestants, cough suppressants, and use of a humidifier can provide symptomatic relief.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ A sick child is advised to remain at home during the first days of illness when symptoms are most severe and the infection is most contagious. A child can return to school when symptoms are improving and he has had no fever for at least 24 hours.
- ✓ School closings have not been shown to be an effective control measure. If necessary because of high absenteeism, the decision to temporarily close a school should be made by school officials and local public health authorities.
- ✓ It is not too late to get a flu shot! The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends yearly flu vaccine for anyone with a chronic medical condition or a weakened immune system, people aged 50 years and older, children aged 6-24 months, and women more than 3 months pregnant during flu season. Flu vaccine should be considered for people who want to protect themselves and others around them against the flu. Although vaccination just before the flu season is best, the flu season can last weeks or even months, so vaccination during the season is better than not being vaccinated at all.
- ✓ Remind everyone, including students, faculty, and staff, to wash his/her hands.

Please contact your physician or local, district, or state health department if you have any questions.

More information on Influenza and Influenza Vaccine can be found at:

- Georgia Immunization Program - <http://health.state.ga.us/programs/immunization/flu.shtml>
- Georgia Influenza Surveillance - <http://health.state.ga.us/epi/flu/>
- CDC National Immunization Program - <http://www.cdc.gov/nip/flu/default.htm>
- CDC Influenza Surveillance - <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/flu/weeklychoice.htm>

