

## GUIDANCE FOR OUTBREAK RESPONSE WHEN ACUTE RESPIRATORY ILLNESS IS FOUND AT YOUR SCHOOL OR FACILITY.

**Note:** Facilities located in counties or municipalities with independent health departments should continue to follow the guidance provided by their local health department. This includes providers in Allegheny, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Erie, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties and those in Allentown, Bethlehem, Wilkes-Barre, and York cities.

### EXAMPLES OF ACUTE RESPIRATORY ILLNESSES ARE INFLUENZA, RSV, AND COVID-19

DISEASE FACT SHEETS ARE POSTED BY THE PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (PADOH):

- [RSV.pdf \(pa.gov\)](#)
- [Influenza \(pa.gov\)](#)
- [Coronavirus in Pennsylvania \(pa.gov\)](#)



#### CLOSURES OF SCHOOLS OR CHILDCARE CENTERS ARE NOT TYPICALLY RECOMMENDED IN RESPONSE TO AN OUTBREAK OF RESPIRATORY ILLNESS

Schools or childcare centers should contact their local health department or PADOH at **1-877-PA-HEALTH** for additional guidance on outbreak response.

#### EXCLUSION CRITERIA FOR STAFF AND CHILDREN

Exclude until fever free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication. All licensing agency requirements should be followed.

#### REPORTING CRITERIA TO THE PADOH<sup>1</sup>

Outbreaks or suspected outbreaks should be reported to PADOH by calling **1-877-PA-HEALTH** or their local health department.

Individual cases of influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), or COVID-19 do not need to be reported by the school/childcare center.

School/childcare centers may opt to report and consult with PADOH on any case of concern, at any point in time. PADOH may contact school/childcare centers to request specific information on cases.

## WHAT IS AN ACUTE RESPIRATORY ILLNESS OUTBREAK IN A SCHOOL OR FACILITY?

Two or more staff or students with the same confirmed pathogen (e.g., influenza, RSV, COVID-19, or other respiratory virus) within a 7-day period who are epidemiologically linked by classroom, wing (i.e., in the same classroom or wing), or attended a group activity together).<sup>2</sup>

-OR-

Increase in absenteeism facility-wide (i.e., more absences than would be expected for that time of the school year), resulting in an increased number of students or staff who are absent for three or more days as a result of respiratory or COVID-like symptoms. The absentees do not need to be from the same classroom or wing or be epidemiologically linked; this can also include one confirmed RSV or Influenza or COVID-19 case and other individuals reporting similar symptoms.<sup>3,4</sup>

### **Respiratory or COVID-like symptoms can include:**

Coughing, sneezing, runny nose, fever, myalgia, malaise, sore throat, wheezing, etc.

A list of additional symptoms is [available here](#) .

## HOW TO PREVENT AND CONTROL AN OUTBREAK

- Encourage students and applicable staff to remain up-to-date with vaccinations for all three viruses (e.g., COVID-19, RSV, and influenza). Vaccinations are the most effective way to prevent people from getting seriously ill, being hospitalized, or dying.
  - For additional information on applicable groups to receive the RSV vaccine, please visit [adult immunization schedule by Age | CDC](#).
- Reinforce respiratory etiquette to students and staff, such as:
  - Reinforce frequent hand washing with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
  - Coughing and sneezing into a tissue or elbow.
  - Properly disposing of tissues.
  - Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
  - Avoid close contact with sick people, if possible.
  - Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as toys, doorknobs, and mobile devices, at least once a day and when visibly dirty.
- Follow the facility/school's illness policies if respiratory (i.e., COVID-19, RSV, or influenza) symptoms develop during the school day.
- Encourage students and staff to [stay at home](#) when sick. Individuals who have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or other respiratory illness should stay home until symptoms (i.e., fever, fatigue, coughing, etc.) improve and fever-free for at least 24 hours (without the use of fever reduction medication).
- Encourage testing for respiratory viruses if exposed to decide the next steps and lower the chances of spreading the virus to others.
- When a student/staff member returns to normal activities after staying home and away from others, they should take added precautions for the next 5 days, such as masking, distancing, proper hygiene, and testing when around people indoors.
- Schools should take additional steps toward cleaner air to lower the risk of respiratory viruses.

## RESOURCES

[PA DOH New Respiratory Virus Guidance](#)

[RSV \(Respiratory Syncytial Virus\) | CDC](#)

[RSV in Infants and Young Children \(cdc.gov\)](#)

[Influenza Childcare \(pa.gov\)](#)

[COVID-19 Testing: What You Need to Know | CDC](#)

[When and How to Clean and Disinfect a Facility | Water, Sanitation, and Environmentally Related Hygiene \(WASH\) | CDC](#)

[Improving Ventilation In Buildings | CDC](#)

[CDC Respiratory Virus Guidance](#)

[Risk Factors for Severe Illness from Respiratory Viruses | Respiratory Illnesses | CDC](#)

[Treatment of Respiratory Viruses | Respiratory Illnesses | CDC](#)

[Background for CDC's Updated Respiratory Virus Guidance | Respiratory Illnesses | CDC](#)

[Immunizations for Respiratory Viruses Prevention | Respiratory Illnesses | CDC](#)

[Hygiene and Respiratory Viruses Prevention | Respiratory Illnesses | CDC](#)

[Taking Steps for Cleaner Air for Respiratory Virus Prevention | Respiratory Illnesses | CDC](#)

[About Preventing Spread of Respiratory Viruses When You're Sick | Respiratory Illnesses | CDC](#)

[Masks and Respiratory Viruses Prevention | Respiratory Illnesses | CDC](#)

[About Physical Distancing and Respiratory Viruses | Respiratory Illnesses | CDC](#)

[Immunization Schedules | CDC](#)

[RSV.pdf \(pa.gov\)](#)

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Per [28. PA. Code § 27.3 Reporting outbreaks and unusual diseases, infections, and conditions.](#)

<sup>2</sup>A single case of RSV, influenza, or COVID-19 simultaneously occurring within a 7-day period would not be considered an outbreak; however, the PADOH is available to assist with recommendations related to co-circulating pathogens as well as multi-pathogen outbreaks.

<sup>3</sup>Per [28 Pa. Code § 27.21a Reporting of cases by healthcare practitioners and health care facilities](#)

(c) A school nurse shall report to the local morbidity reporting office (LMRO) any unusual increase in the number of absentees among school children. A caregiver at a childcare group setting shall report to the LMRO any unusual increase in the number of absentees among children attending the childcare group setting.

<sup>4</sup>Absenteeism reporting can include all-cause syndrome-specific, illness absenteeism, or some other approach. Reporting may occur on the school level, across groups of schools geographically, or by school district.