

Vandalia Community School District #203

October 28, 2018

Dear Vandalia CUSD Staff & Parents/Guardians,

As the 2018-19 cold and influenza (flu) season begins, I would like to review some measures that may help your family stay healthier this season.

One important measure is for children and adults to get a seasonal influenza vaccine each year to protect against seasonal flu and its potential complications. For 2018-19, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends all children aged 6 months and older receive the influenza vaccine. The CDC also recommends adults who are in close contact with young children, or adults in contact with children of any age with chronic illnesses, to obtain the influenza vaccine. The vaccine is widely available in our area at physician offices, the local health department, and local pharmacies.

Illnesses like colds and flu are spread easily from person to person via respiratory droplets. These droplets are spread by coughing, sneezing, or by touching objects or people with contaminated hands. Some viruses and bacteria can live two hours or longer on surfaces such as desks and doorknobs.

Another illness that is common during the winter months is the “stomach bug” or gastroenteritis. This illness is not the “flu” the influenza vaccination protects against. Noroviruses are responsible for about half of all gastroenteritis outbreaks. Norovirus outbreaks occur throughout the year, but over 80% of them occur during November-April.

Although viral illnesses can spread from person to person during normal daily activities, there are some simple things which help reduce the spread of illness. Please remind your students or children of the following healthy habits.

- 1. Cover your mouth and nose when sneezing.** If available, use a tissue and wash your hands afterwards. Use your inner elbow or upper sleeve rather than your hands if a tissue is unavailable. This practice prevents the spread of germs via your hands.
- 2. Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose, and mouth.**
- 3. Clean your hands often with soap and warm water or an alcohol-based sanitizer.** At routine bathroom breaks, encourage children to wash properly while in the bathroom. In addition to using soap and water, children should not rush while washing their hands. A recommendation to help them wash long enough is to sing the “Happy Birthday” song silently while washing. When the song is finished, then they have washed long enough for at least 20 seconds. You can set a good example by doing this yourself.
- 4. Do not share personal items, cups, water bottles, or eating utensils.**
- 5. Know the signs and symptoms of the flu.** Symptoms of the flu include fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit, 37.8 degrees Celsius or greater), cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headaches, and malaise (feeling very tired). Gastroenteritis symptoms include vomiting and diarrhea.
- 6. Sick children should stay home.** Children with a fever should stay home. If they have had a recent fever, they should not return to school until they have been fever free for 24 hours without the help of

fever reducing medications such as Tylenol or Ibuprofen. This means if they are sent home with an elevated temperature from school, they are asked to stay home on the following day. This is to allow time to ensure that their elevated temperature does not return.

7. Do not send children to school if they are sick. Children should also stay home (with or without fever) if they have symptoms which are obvious of illness, i.e. recent vomiting, cough, malaise, congestion. Sometimes, it is difficult to decide in the morning whether a child is well enough to attend school. You can ask yourself, “Can my child go through the day with minimal disruption to himself and others?” By staying home when they are sick, children are helping themselves recuperate and are helping their peers stay healthy.

By working together, I believe we can reduce the spread of illness at school. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Joy Lewis, MSN, RN

District Nurse

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