

Dear Parents;

A variety of illnesses have hit our Polk County schools in the past few weeks resulting in a significant rise in absenteeism. In addition to seasonal cold symptoms and strep throat, we have a number of reports of confirmed Influenza and gastrointestinal illness (stomach “flu”). These are two different illnesses often called by same name—flu. Here are the symptoms of each:

- Influenza is a respiratory disease that is highly contagious. It usually presents with a sudden onset of fever, weakness/fatigue, cough, body aches, and, sometimes in children, stomach upset and/or diarrhea. It is caused by a virus so it cannot be treated with antibiotics.
- Gastrointestinal illness (the stomach “flu”) is a very contagious illness also caused by a virus. It presents with nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea. Sometimes there is a fever or chills.

We can all take some simple steps to slow and hopefully prevent the spread of illness in our schools as well as our homes. Encourage all family members to follow these steps:

- Stay home if you are ill. This is probably the most important step to take as it keeps you from sharing your illness with others.
- Wash your hands after toileting, blowing your nose, coughing/sneezing into your hand or tissue, and after helping children with these activities. Use hand sanitizer if you cannot access soap and water.
- Cough into the inside of your elbow and teach your children to do it. If you cough into your hand, you are more likely to then touch other surfaces and spread those unwanted germs and viruses before you can wash your hands.
- Clean surfaces to reduce the spread. This includes counters, toilet seats, tables, and any area where an ill person spends time.
- It is not too late to vaccinate! If your family has not already received influenza vaccine, call your medical provider or the Polk County Health Department (715-485-8500) to get vaccinated. Influenza vaccine is recommended for everyone over the age of 6 months.

If you have questions or concerns about influenza and other conditions/illnesses, feel free to contact the Polk County Health Department at 715-485-8500.