



Dear Arlington Public Schools (APS) Families and Staff,

UPDATED Fall/Winter 2024/2025

Winter illness season is here. Norovirus, influenza (flu), and COVID-19, are some illnesses to be aware of this season. To protect yourself and others, please keep your child home and notify the school clinic if they are sick. The School Health Program asks that you please read the following to help identify and prevent the spread of illness:

FACTS ABOUT NOROVIRUS: People of all ages can get infected and sick with norovirus. It is sometimes called the "stomach flu" or the "stomach bug." However, norovirus illness is not related to the flu, which is caused by the influenza virus. Norovirus causes acute gastroenteritis, an inflammation of the stomach or intestines. Most people with norovirus illness get better within 1 to 3 days; but they can still spread the virus for a few days after. Proper handwashing and other simple steps can help prevent getting and spreading norovirus.

HOW IT SPREADS: Norovirus is very contagious; it spreads very easily and quickly. You can get norovirus from sick people and through contaminated food, water, or surfaces. You are most contagious when you have symptoms of norovirus illness or during the few days after you feel better. You can find norovirus in your vomit or feces (poop) even before you start feeling sick. The virus can also stay in your poop for 2 weeks or more after you feel better. You can still spread norovirus during that time.

SYMPTOMS: The most common symptoms of norovirus are diarrhea, vomiting, nausea, stomach pain/cramping, and/or low-grade fever. A person usually develops symptoms 12 to 48 hours after being exposed to norovirus.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO: If you or your child is sick with GI illness, wait **at least 2 days (48 hours) after symptoms stop before returning to work or sending your child to school.** This is important if you work in a restaurant, school, daycare, long-term care facility, or other places where you may expose people to norovirus. Make sure you and your child **are washing your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm water** both at home and at school. Scrubbing should last for at least 20 seconds.

FACTS ABOUT FLU: The Flu is a spreadable illness caused by different types of influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness. Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health issues, including pregnancy, asthma, lung and heart problems, weakened immune systems, and others, are at high risk for serious flu complications. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting the flu shot each year.

HOW IT SPREADS: Influenza and similar viruses are spread by coughing, sneezing, and close contact. Less often, a person might get flu by touching an object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes, or nose. Sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses may also spread flu.

SYMPTOMS: The most common symptoms of flu are fever or feeling feverish/chills and either a new cough or sore throat. Feeling tired, muscle soreness, headaches, and runny/stuffy nose may also occur. Some people – especially children – may also have vomiting and diarrhea. These symptoms can also present in someone with COVID-19.

MEDICINES TO PREVENT FLU: If you or your child fall into one of the high-risk groups above **and** have been around someone with flu, please talk with a healthcare provider about whether taking medication before illness develops is right for you.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO: Please keep your student home if they have fever (a temperature of 100.4°F), vomiting, and/or diarrhea. Students should not return to school until 24 hours of no fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.

FACTS ABOUT COVID-19: COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) can spread very easily and quickly. Most people with COVID-19 have mild symptoms, but some people become very ill. Some people are more likely than others to get very sick if they get COVID-19. This includes people who are older, who have weak immune systems, have certain



disabilities, or have unknown health conditions. The best way to lower the chance of getting very sick with COVID-19 is by staying up to date with the COVID-19 vaccine, even for persons who have had COVID-19 in the past.

HOW IT SPREADS: COVID-19 spreads when a person with COVID-19 breathes out droplets that contain the virus. These droplets can be breathed in by other people or land on their eyes, noses, or mouth. COVID-19 is most commonly spread by coughing, sneezing, and close contact with someone sick with COVID-19. Less often, a person might also get sick by touching an object that has been soiled by someone else and then touching their own mouth, eyes or nose. Sharing forks and spoons or drinking glasses with someone sick with COVID-19 may also lead to illness. Avoid transfer or contact with saliva (i.e. through kissing or sharing objects like food utensils, cups, soda cans, and bottles of water).

SYMPTOMS: The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever or chills, a new cough, sore throat shortness of breath, and new loss of taste or smell. Feeling tired, having sore muscles, headaches, and runny/stuffy nose also may occur. Some people, especially children, may also have vomiting and diarrhea.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO: Please keep your student home if they have fever (a temperature of 100.4°F), vomiting, and/or diarrhea. Students should not return to school until 24 hours of no fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.

HOW TO HELP PREVENT THE SPREAD OF ILLNESS:

PLEASE REMEMBER: Covering coughs or sneezes; staying home when sick, and washing hands regularly and thoroughly are very important to help prevent both catching and spreading the flu, COVID-19, and norovirus. Children may be excluded from school if they have an illness that prevents them from participating comfortably in school activities or if there is a risk of spreading contagious disease to others. More information on APS illness guidelines can be found here: <https://www.apsva.us/health-safety/illness/>

It's not too late for vaccination against the flu, or COVID-19!

For the flu vaccine: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) *recommends that everyone ages 6 months and older should receive a flu vaccine each year.*

- To find flu vaccines near you go to <https://www.vaccines.gov/find-vaccines/> and type in your zip code and select your vaccine option.
- The Arlington County Public Health Division also has vaccine clinics each week. Click [here](#) for more information about appointment times, locations, and costs.

For the COVID-19 vaccine: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) *recommends that everyone ages 6 months and older should get a 2024-2025 COVID-19 vaccine.*

- To find COVID-19 vaccines near you go to <https://www.vaccines.gov/find-vaccines/> and type in your zip code and select your vaccine option.

MORE INFORMATION: General information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on respiratory illnesses is available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/index.html>. Information from the CDC on norovirus is available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/index.html>.

Sincerely,

Sarah Bell, MPH, BSN, RN
School Health Bureau Director