

Each year, illness from respiratory viruses such as influenza, COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) leads to absences from school, primary care visits, hospitalizations, and serious complications for some individuals. To maintain a healthy learning environment, every school should have a plan to respond to respiratory viral illnesses and outbreaks occurring on their campus. The Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) works with schools to prevent, respond to, and mitigate outbreaks of communicable diseases, including respiratory viruses. This document provides general guidance and best practices to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, identifies initial actions schools can take in response to a suspected respiratory illness outbreak, and provides information on reporting suspected outbreaks to DOH. This information is provided to help form the basis, or starting point, for sound school health policies relating to seasonal respiratory viral illnesses.

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## I. Staying Safe from Respiratory Viruses at School: Six Strategies

To support schools with expanded mitigation for multiple respiratory viruses that are spread in shared settings such as classrooms, cafeterias, and libraries, DOH has identified strategies and practices that are recommended for the school year. Each strategy is explained below with links to additional information.

### 1. Get Immunized

Immunizations are key to the body's defense against viruses. Schools can reduce the burden of respiratory diseases by encouraging students and staff to stay up to date with vaccines for influenza, COVID-19, and other vaccine preventable diseases. Find current Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended vaccines and schedules [here](#). For schools interested in hosting onsite vaccinations clinics, call: 808.586.8300. Community clinics and primary care providers are also options. Schools can help students, families, and staff by sharing this vaccine locator: [www.vaccines.gov](http://www.vaccines.gov).

### 2. Stay Home When Sick

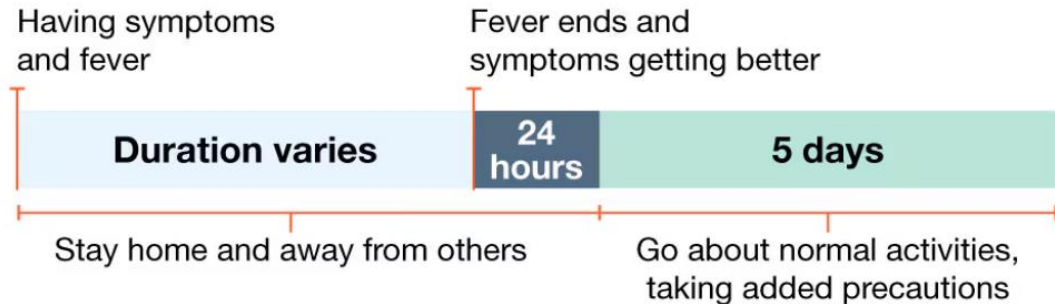
Schools should have policies that support students and staff staying home when they have symptoms of a respiratory virus\*. At a minimum, students and staff should stay home until fever free for 24 hours after the fever ends (without fever-reducing medications). The timeline for each person will vary; below are four visuals

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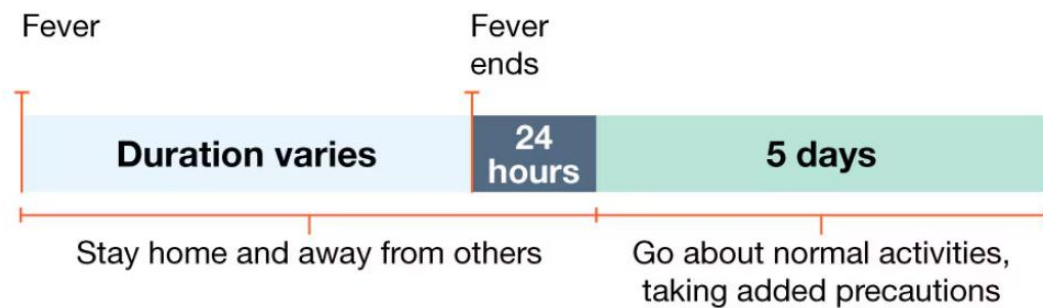
depicting common timelines. (More information and the source of the CDC graphics can be found [here](#).) Additionally, schools should allow flexible, non-punitive, and supportive sick leave policies and practices that encourage sick staff to stay home without fear of retaliation, loss of pay, or loss of employment level.

\*Symptoms may include but are not limited to chest discomfort, chills, cough, decrease in appetite, diarrhea, fatigue (tiredness), fever or feeling feverish, headache, muscle or body aches, new loss of taste or smell, runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, sore throat, vomiting, weakness, wheezing.

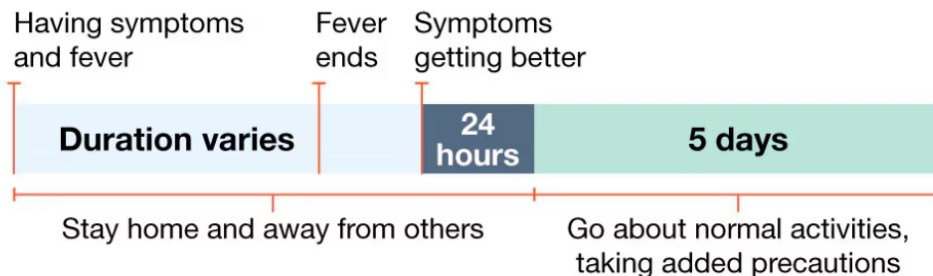
Example 1: Person with fever and symptoms.

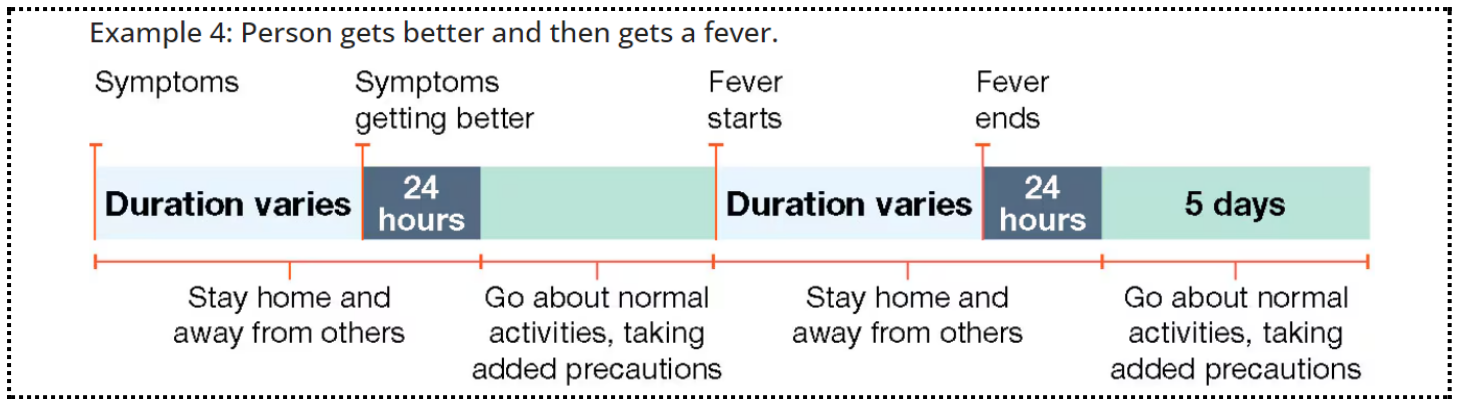


Example 2: Person with fever but no other symptoms.



Example 3: Person with fever and other symptoms, fever ends but other symptoms take longer to improve.





**Added precautions\*** can include the following actions such as:

- ★ Avoiding contact with people with compromised immune systems
- ★ Masking
- ★ Increasing the frequency of hygiene practices to include hand washing
- ★ Monitoring possible symptoms and potentially testing if symptoms start or return

\*Schools determine how to integrate the **added precautions** to their policies to support students and staff.

### 3. Wear a Mask

Wearing a mask reduces the spread of viruses by protecting students and staff. Masks also limit the respiratory droplets that infected students or staff expel into classrooms and shared spaces. DOH considers masking to be a highly effective strategy that can be applied both in response to known illness on campus and as a preventive measure. Additionally, masking is one response to a cluster of cases on campus that can provide an immediate reduction in transmission. Schools should promote DOH recommendations which are students and staff are recommended to wear a mask:

- ★ When symptomatic
- ★ When recovering from a respiratory illness
- ★ For added protection when in crowded spaces and/or indoors
- ★ When in regular close contact with someone at higher risk of severe disease

Additionally, **schools with students at high risk for serious respiratory disease** should make reasonable modifications to ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, are able to access in-person learning. [Federal civil rights laws](#) may require that schools [provide reasonable modifications or accommodations in various circumstances](#). Schools must provide reasonable modifications or reasonable accommodations, when necessary, to ensure equal access to in-person learning for students with disabilities during increased infectious illness activity. Nothing in this guidance is intended to detract from or supersede these laws.

### 4. Practice Good Hygiene

Blocking the transmission of pathogens is critical on campuses and at centers. Two methods help reduce the spread. Blocking droplets from coughs and sneezes with arms or masks, and frequently washing hands while on campus, prevents the spread of respiratory viruses. These practices need to be taught to young students

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and integrated into the healthy school practices each day. Doing so will improve attendance and reduce cases and the potential for outbreaks.

Disinfection and cleaning are important practices because they remove virus particles from surfaces. For daily cleaning, school and center teams can review [How to Clean and Disinfect Early Care and Education Settings](#) from CDC to ensure that cleaning protocols and practices align with the needs of schools and centers. It may also be necessary to pivot and revise protocols that have continued since they were initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 5. Take Steps for Cleaner Air

Ventilation and filtering air are important components of school policy because air is shared across spaces and virus particles can build up more easily inside. If windows in classrooms and shared spaces cannot remain open due to the use of air conditioners, consider these [recommendations from CDC](#) to improve the effectiveness of HVAC systems at schools or centers. Additionally, the use of high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters in spaces that have air flow closed off can improve air quality. Using air flow and CO2 sensors to monitor ventilation in classrooms is another option. Overall, using available resources to maximize ventilation and reduce particles in the air will also reduce the transmission of respiratory viruses in classrooms. Additional information from the CDC can found [here](#).

### 6. Test and Treat

Schools should encourage parents/guardians to seek medical attention for their child if there are concerns about their child's symptoms. A child's healthcare provider may advise testing and treatment if appropriate. Schools can also inform their communities that treatments are available for flu and COVID-19. Prompt testing can help people at higher risk get appropriate treatment quickly.

## II. Responding to Respiratory Viruses at Schools

When absenteeism increases on campus due to respiratory virus symptoms, multiple students or staff are experiencing symptoms of respiratory illness in a class or shared activity, or a teacher or administrator otherwise suspects respiratory viruses are spreading on campus, schools can take the following steps to reduce the spread of illness.

- ★ Maximize use of the Six Staying Safe Strategies – add additional strategies; select strategies based on your school's resources and identified gaps. For example:
  - Lesson on handwashing flyers around room/video instruction
  - Make masks available and encourage use
  - Increase frequency of cleaning of high touch surfaces during the day
  - Use of air flow sensors
- ★ Communicate with parents and guardians about the increased respiratory illness activity and share information about the specific virus if it is known
- ★ Encourage parents and guardians to share test results/information with the school so the health staff or school leadership are able to monitor which types of respiratory viruses are active on campus and respond more effectively to specific causes of illness
- ★ Monitor absenteeism in relation to the respiratory virus thresholds (listed below) for an outbreak

### III. Reporting Respiratory Virus Outbreaks at Schools and Centers

Respiratory virus outbreaks can occur in school settings when respiratory infections (such as flu, COVID-19, and RSV) are spread from person to person. **Schools should report potential outbreaks of respiratory illness to DOH when daily absentee rates due to suspected illness meet or exceed these thresholds:**

- Absentee rate exceeds 10% of the entire school; **or**
- Absentee rate exceeds 20% of one grade or class.

Schools can consult with DOH about potential outbreaks using the phone numbers below. Schools can also access information about reporting on [this site](#).

Island	Hours	Contact	Telephone Number
O'ahu	M-F 7:45 am - 4:30 pm	Disease Reporting Line	(808) 586-4586, Option 3 for Schools
Maui, Moloka'i, Lāna'i	M-F 7:45 am - 4:30 pm	Maui District Health Office	(808) 984-8213
Kauai	M-F 7:45 am - 4:30 pm	Kauai District Health Office	808-241-3563
Hawai'i	M-F 7:45 am - 4:30 pm	Hawai'i District Health Office	East 808.933.0912 West 808.322.4877

### IV. Additional Resources

- A. [CDC Respiratory Virus Guidance](#)
- B. [Science Brief: Prevention and Control of Respiratory and Gastrointestinal Infections in Kindergarten through Grade 12 \(K12\) Schools](#)
- C. [Resources to Prepare for COVID-19, Flu, and RSV](#)