

Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC)

Schools - Increased Absenteeism

RESPIRATORY OR GASTROINTESTINAL ILLNESS IPAC CONSIDERATIONS

Infection prevention and control measures to consider when schools see an increased rate of illness among students and staff. These measures may be considered for a specific classroom or school wide depending on the illness.

1. How many students are absent?
2. What grade / classroom are they in? Do you see a cluster in a specific age group?
3. What symptoms are they experiencing?

Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) Considerations

- Implement regular announcements encouraging the following:
 - o students and staff to wash their hands regularly
 - o report any signs or symptoms of increased illness
 - o stay home when they are feeling unwell

Announcement Template: *"We are currently seeing an increase in student and staff illness. We ask that all students and staff wash their hands regularly, report any signs or symptoms of feeling unwell to their teacher or parents and stay home when you are feeling unwell."*

Classroom Considerations

- Promote frequent and proper hand hygiene.
 - o Ensuring students clean their hands prior to using sensory items (e.g., water, sand, rice, etc.), before and after eating and after outdoor activities.
 - o Signage to remind student to wash their hands
 - [Kid's Hand Washing Poster.pdf \(publichealthgreybruce.on.ca\)](https://publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Kid's%20Hand%20Washing%20Poster.pdf)
 - Steps to Hand Washing [Poster.indd \(publichealthgreybruce.on.ca\)](https://publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Poster.indd)
- Increase the cleaning and disinfection of high touch surfaces within the school and classroom (examples of high touch surfaces include door knobs, light switches, desk tops, hand rails, shared computer keyboards, mice, toys or learning props, etc.)

Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC)

- Students should be discouraged from sharing personal items or food.
- Sensory items may need to be limited or suspended during high periods of illness. Sensory items are generally difficult to keep clean.

Custodial staff considerations:

- Regular and thorough cleaning and disinfection are important to prevent and control the spread of infections in a classroom and school. Cleaning and disinfection is a two-step process. Cleaning involves manually/physically removing all visible dirt from a surface or object. Cleaning is accomplished with water, detergents and wiping of the surfaces. Disinfection is a process that reduces the number of germs on a surface. Most disinfectants are designed for application to surfaces that have been pre-cleaned. Some products combine a cleaner with a disinfectant. Consult with your cleaning product supplier for the products best suited to the school environment.
- Increase cleaning of high touch surfaces throughout the school. Examples of high touch surfaces include door knobs, light switches, desk tops, hand rails, shared computer keyboards and computer mice.
- Always follow the manufacturer instructions for use (MIFU). Including the appropriate contact time (the time in which a surface must remain wet in order to achieve the disinfection action).
- Review the product to ensure that it is effective against potential infectious agents such as influenza, COVID, norovirus, hand foot and mouth etc. In some cases you may need to connect with the board office to obtain an appropriate product e.g., gastrointestinal symptoms (norovirus).
- Review the current process for cleaning and disinfection and ensure that custodial staff clean from least soiled surfaces to most soiled surfaces and from high surfaces to low surfaces.
- Ensure that hand hygiene supplies are full e.g., liquid soap and paper towel in bathrooms and classrooms, have alcohol based hand rub available (if applicable).
- Review the HVAC system and increase the number of air exchanges whenever possible. For portable units place them in areas of high incidence (e.g., a classroom with a high number of absenteeism or high traffic areas e.g., common hallways, gymnasium etc.).
- Hands should be washed after performing any cleaning and after removing housekeeping gloves.

References: [Preventing Infection in Schools - School Health Reference Guide - Region of Peel \(peelregion.ca\)](https://www.peelregion.ca/health/prevention-infection-schools/)