



MARYLAND Department of Health

Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Dennis Schrader, Secretary

H3N2v Variant Influenza (Flu) Guidance for Schools, Child Care Centers, and Family Child Care Homes - October, 2017

The 2017-2018 influenza (flu) season is underway, and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) urges schools, child care centers and family child care homes to take precautions to protect children from seasonal flu, as well as a type of flu called H3N2v variant flu.

In September, Maryland health officials identified the H3N2v variant flu virus in people who had close contact with pigs at several Maryland fairs. Additionally, the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) identified this same virus in Maryland pigs that were exhibited at these fairs.

Flu is an infection caused by the influenza virus which can affect people and other animals, including pigs and birds. Flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs are called “variant” viruses when they infect humans. Symptoms of H3N2v variant flu are the same as seasonal flu and include fever and respiratory symptoms, such as sore throat and cough. The treatment recommendations for H3N2v variant flu are the same as for seasonal flu.

While the Maryland fair season has finished, there are still many situations where children could potentially be exposed to pigs, such as during field trips to farms, petting zoos, etc. It is important for school staff and child care providers to be aware of current health recommendations for interaction with pigs and other animals.

To help minimize the risk of children contracting variant flu, MDH recommends:

1) Help prevent the spread of flu between pigs and people

- **Anyone who is at high risk of serious flu complications planning to attend a setting where pigs will be present should avoid pigs and swine barns. This includes:**
 - Children younger than 5 years
 - People 65 years and older
 - Pregnant women
 - People with certain long-term health conditions, like asthma and other lung disease, diabetes, heart disease, weakened immune systems, and neurological or neurodevelopmental conditions.
- **For those who are not at high risk of serious flu complications, recommendations include:**
 - Don't take toys, pacifiers, cups, baby bottles, strollers, or similar items into pig areas.
 - Avoid close contact with pigs that look or act ill.
 - Take protective measures if you must come in contact with pigs that are known or suspected to be sick. This includes minimizing contact with pigs and wearing personal protective equipment like protective clothing, gloves and masks that cover your mouth and nose when contact is required.

- To further reduce the risk of infection, minimize contact with pigs in the pig barn and arenas.
- If pig exposure is inevitable, wash your hands often with soap and running water before and after exposure to pigs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

2) **Identify suspected cases of H3N2v variant flu virus in children**

Historically, there has been limited human-to-human transmission from H3N2v variant flu. However, we recommend school staff and child care providers be vigilant for possible cases among children who may have exposure to pigs in other venues, or to people with close contacts to pigs.

For the general public, we recommend that people with flu-like illness – symptoms including fever, cough and/or sore throat – contact their healthcare provider and inform them if they have had pig contact within the past seven days. Health care providers are advised to contact their local health departments if they suspect variant flu in their patients to coordinate appropriate testing with their local health department. School staff and child care providers should inform parents and guardians of the need to be seen by a health care provider if they have a flu-like illness.

3) **Help slow the spread of all flu viruses, including H3N2v:**

- Encourage children and staff with flu-like illness to seek medical attention, regardless of whether they have recently been near pigs.
- Encourage sick children and staff to stay home until their illness is over (fever free for at least 24 hours without fever reducing medicines), as per MDH’s [Communicable Diseases Summary](#) and the Maryland State Department of Education’s [Illness and Reportable Diseases in Child Care Resource Guide](#).
- Educate parents, children, and staff to take everyday preventive actions to prevent the spread of flu.
- Ensure adequate time and supplies are provided for handwashing and encourage children and staff to practice cough etiquette.
- Encourage children and staff to get the seasonal flu vaccine. While this vaccine will not protect against H3N2v variant flu, it will help to slow the spread of seasonal flu.

Additional information on H3N2v variant flu

- The CDC website contains useful supplemental guidance for schools to respond to flu, including the H3N2v virus: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu/h3n2v-schools.htm>
- Attached are CDC posters, which contain helpful guidance applicable to schools and child care centers and homes about flu prevention and treatment:
 - [Influenza \(Flu\): Cleaning to Prevent the Flu](#)
 - [Influenza \(Flu\): What to Do If Your Child Gets Sick with the Flu](#)
 - [School Guide: How to Clean and Disinfect School to Help Slow the Spread of Flu](#)
- Additional information about H3N2v variant flu is also available on the MDH website at <https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/Pages/variant-influenza.aspx>

If you have any questions about these recommendations, please contact the Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Outbreak Response Bureau at 410-767-6700.