

► **Achhhoooooooo! Not Another Cold! Tips on Avoiding Colds and Flu**

Dealing with the stress of a new job can be tough on anyone. But add a couple hundred kids in close quarters and you've got a virtual virus incubator, a breeding ground for bugs whose only goal is to sap your energy -- and all your sick days!

It's nearly impossible for new school employees to avoid all of the colds and flu being passed from student to student (and then to staff!). But the health care folks at MESSA (Michigan Education Special Services Association) have a number of good tips to help you minimize your exposure and stay healthy.

Is it a Cold? Or the flu?

Colds and influenza (flu) are caused by two different types of viruses. Cold symptoms are usually mild and often include a stuffy or runny nose, watery eyes, sore throat, dry cough, headache, fatigue, body aches, chills or slight fever. Flu is a serious acute respiratory infection that usually begins with an abrupt onset of fever, intense body aches or headache, and a dry cough.

Colds and flu cannot be cured with antibiotics, unless a bacterial infection is also present. The best treatment for either is to get lots of bed rest, drink plenty of fluids and take Tylenol or Advil to ease body aches.

Avoiding Viruses

While you aren't going to be able to completely escape all of the viruses circulating inside a school building, it is possible to minimize your risk by following a few basic practices:

- Wash your hands frequently- rub for 20 seconds before rinsing.
- Encourage students to wash their hands, too.
- Keep your hands away from your face.
- Get a flu shot if you're eligible.
- Keep boxes of tissues handy for students (ask parents to send a box in).
- Don't share towels, utensils, food, drinks, telephones or keyboards.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes.
- Teach students to cough into their shirt sleeve, rather than into their open hands.
- Exercise, get good rest and eat healthy.

When to Contact Your Doctor

Most colds and flu go away with bed rest and drinking plenty of fluids. You should contact your doctor if:

- a symptom lasts more than 10 days.
- coughing is severe, uncontrollable, painful, or brings up rusty or gray-green material.
- breathing is painful, wheezy or difficult.
- you have a severe earache or discharge.
- you have a fever of 102°F or higher.
- your cold gets complicated by bronchitis or ear infections.
- you are especially concerned or have questions.

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Maintaining good health can be a challenge at any stage of your career. For more information about how you can take charge of your health, visit MESSA on the Web at **www.messa.org**.

MESSA members can also access a multitude of health care resources provided by MESSA's on-line partner, Mayo Clinic. Just click on "What's New."

MESSA is a non-profit membership organization formed by the MEA 40 years ago to provide high quality insurance coverage and unequalled personalized service to school employees across Michigan. More than 90,000 MEA and ESP members enjoy the peace of mind and security that MESSA provides.