

# Let's protect what matters

## Communicable Diseases Branch

Email [CMDU@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:CMDU@health.qld.gov.au)



## Schools

### Acute respiratory infections

May 2026

#### Stop the spread of respiratory illness in schools

Schools can help reduce the spread of illness by sharing these simple vaccination and hygiene messages with staff, students and families.

##### Get vaccinated

- Vaccination is the best way to prevent severe illness, complications and hospitalisation from acute respiratory infections.
- Getting a flu vaccine before the peak season (winter months) offers the best protection, however vaccination still helps if given later in the season.
- Influenza (flu), COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccines are available through GPs, pharmacies or other immunisation service providers. Details on recommended vaccines are outlined on page 2.

##### Practice good hygiene

- Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or the inside of your elbow.
- Throw used tissues into a bin straight away.
- Clean hands thoroughly and regularly with soap and water or hand sanitiser.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, taps, tables, remote controls, phones, laptops, benchtops and fridge doors. Clean your hands after cleaning.
- Improve air flow by opening windows or increasing ventilation where possible.

##### Stay at home when unwell

- Staff and students should stay home when unwell to prevent spreading illness.

## Prepare, identify, respond

Acute respiratory infections (ARIs) can spread quickly in schools where students learn and play closely together. Preventing ARIs is a shared effort, and parents, caregivers and staff all play a key role.

Viruses that cause ARIs include flu, COVID-19 and RSV. These viruses can disrupt schools and cause serious illness in students, their families, staff and the wider community.

Although the flu, COVID-19 and RSV are different viruses, the ways to prevent them from spreading are largely the same.

Schools should prepare before the winter season to protect students and staff and to respond quickly if an outbreak occurs. **Let's protect what matters!**

## 1. Prepare – Vaccination and prevention

Vaccination and good hygiene help protect students, staff and families.

- Encourage staff, parents and caregivers to stay up to date with recommended vaccines.
- Encourage parents to vaccinate their children.

### Key Vaccine Information

#### Influenza

- The [Free Flu Vaccination Program](#) is available now for Queensland residents aged 6 months and over, until 30 September 2026
- The [Free Nasal Flu Spray Immunisation Program](#) offers a needle-free nasal spray flu vaccine for children aged 2 to 5 years (before they turn 6) and children aged 6 years to 17 years (inclusive) who struggle with getting a needle. . The nasal spray flu vaccine brand is FluMist®, which has been used to vaccinate millions of children in the Northern Hemisphere (including UK and USA) over the last decade
- Funded injectable flu vaccine is also available year-round for eligible Queensland residents under the National Immunisation Program. Refer to the [Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation clinical advice for 2026](#).
- Priority groups for flu vaccination:
  - All children aged 6 months to 5 years
  - All adults aged 65 years and over
  - People aged 5 to 65 years at higher risk of severe illness:
    - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
    - People with medical risk factors
    - During pregnancy.

#### COVID-19

- COVID-19 vaccination remains vital in protecting people at higher risk of severe illness. COVID-19 vaccines are free for all eligible individuals.
- A free COVID-19 primary course is recommended for:
  - People aged 18 years and older
  - Children aged 6 months to 18 years with medical risk factors.
- Booster doses every 6 or 12 months are recommended based on a person's age and risk of severe illness.

#### RSV

- Free RSV vaccines are available and recommended during pregnancy at 28 to 36 weeks and for eligible infants and children under 2 years.
- RSV vaccines are also recommended and available privately for other high-risk groups. People should speak with their healthcare provider to see if it is right for them. Visit the [Australian Government's RSV webpage](#) for more information.

#### Prevention

- Students and staff should stay home when unwell until they are no longer infectious.
- Parents and staff should follow school or childcare exclusion rules for students who are unwell or have medical conditions. The [Time Out poster](#) is a great tool to support these recommendations.
- Educate staff, parents and caregivers about respiratory and hand hygiene.
- Make sure hand sanitiser, tissues and bins are easy to access.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces regularly.

## 2. Identify – Monitor for symptoms and outbreaks

Parents, caregivers and staff should be aware of ARI symptoms. These may include:

- fever
- cough
- difficulty breathing
- runny or blocked nose
- sore throat
- muscle or joint pain
- tiredness or extreme fatigue
- headache
- sometimes unusual stomach problems.

Anyone with symptoms who is concerned should contact their GP, healthcare provider or call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) for advice.

Schools should monitor for increases in illness among students and staff. Contact the local [public health unit](#) if you suspect an outbreak.

## 3. Respond – Seek support and act early

- Have procedures in place if a child or staff member becomes unwell while at school.
- Early action can reduce the number of students and staff who become ill.
- Contact the local [public health unit](#) early for advice and resources on managing outbreaks.

## Resources for schools

Queensland Health has created a collection of [downloadable resources](#). More resources will be added over the coming weeks.

You can access further advice through the following webpages:

- [Queensland Health advice on immunisation](#)
- [Queensland Health Disease prevention in education and care services](#)
- [Flu in education and care services](#)
- [Flu prevention resources for education sector](#)
- [Queensland Health advice on the flu](#)
- [Queensland Health advice on COVID-19](#)
- [Queensland Health advice on RSV](#)