

Identifying and Reporting Suspect Outbreaks in Edmonton Zone Schools

What should you watch for?

School staff have an important role in helping control the spread of illness in their school. Carefully watching students and attendance systems for signs of illness is called “disease surveillance,” and is the first step in illness management.

Symptoms to watch for are:

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Fever
- Cough
- Rash
- Other unusual symptoms.

What is an “outbreak” of illness?

An outbreak may be suspected in a school in several situations:

- **Student absence due to illness equal to or greater than 10%**
 - If school absence is usually over 10%, or school staff are unable to determine what percent is due to illness and what percent is due to other causes, please contact your school nurse for further direction.
- **2 or more cases of chickenpox reported to the school in less than a week**
 - Please note: Individual cases of chickenpox do not need to be reported to Public Health. Parents reporting a child with chickenpox should be encouraged to contact Health Link at 811. Only a cluster of 2 or more cases of chickenpox should be reported by schools to their school nurse.
- **Any other abnormal cluster of illness that is of concern to school staff.**

How do you report a suspect outbreak?

School staff should report suspect outbreaks to their school nurse. School staff who are unsure how to contact their school nurse should work with the school principal or contact the nearest Public Health Centre.

When a suspect outbreak is identified and reported to Public Health, the school nurse will work with AHS Public Health staff to:

- Assess whether the symptoms reported meet the criteria for an outbreak.
- Provide information and recommendations to assist school staff in preventing further spread of illness.
- Facilitate testing of ill children (as appropriate, or recommended by the Zone Medical Officer of Health) to determine the disease that is causing the illness. In that event, contact information for parents will be requested.
- Potentially provide information letters to the school (which can be shared with parents). These letters will inform parents of the outbreak, advise them how to proceed if their child becomes ill, and provide information on how to prevent the spread of the illness in their own home.