

Communicable Diseases and Common Pests: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for Families and School Staff

DC Public Schools (DCPS) works with the DC Department of General Services (DGS) and the DC Department of Health (DOH) to maintain our school buildings, care for our students, and ensure our schools are safe places that promote the health and well-being of our students and staff. This FAQ provides information about how DCPS works to prevent common health and wellness concerns, what we do when issues come up, and when and how we notify school communities.

How does DCPS work to keep students healthy?

DCPS follows the guidance of DOH, as outlined in the DC Municipal Regulations (DCMR) (<http://tinyurl.com/z957xe2>), to try to keep students healthy and limit the spread of diseases. Students and staff are encouraged to use tissues for coughs and sneezes, or cough and sneeze into the elbow, and to wash hands with soap and water regularly, especially before eating and after going to the bathroom. Students also are sent to the nurse when they are not feeling well. DCPS works with DGS to ensure the school building is safe for students and promotes health.

Communicable Diseases

What are communicable diseases?

Communicable diseases are illnesses that spread from person to person, like the flu. Some communicable diseases require that people who have them be excluded from school for a certain period of time or until certain steps are taken. They are reported to DOH for investigation and guidance. These diseases include conjunctivitis (“pink eye”), diarrhea, illness caused by Haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib), hepatitis, impetigo (bacterial skin infection), measles, meningitis, MRSA, mumps, pertussis (“whooping cough”), pinworms, ring worm, rubella, scabies, strep infection, tuberculosis, and varicella (“chicken pox”). More information on how each of these diseases is handled can be found in the DCMR (<http://tinyurl.com/z957xe2>).

What happens when a student or staff member is suspected of having a communicable disease?

When a student or staff member is suspected of having one of the communicable diseases listed above, the school nurse works with the DOH Epidemiology team, parents (if a student), and the medical providers caring for the student or staff member to confirm the diagnosis. DCPS follows DOH guidance, including when and how communications should go out to school communities, and when students or staff should stay home from school to protect the health of others.

How will I know if someone has a communicable disease at my school?

Our first priority is protecting the privacy, health, and safety of our students. DCPS follows DOH guidance, including when and how communications should go out to school communities, and when students or staff should stay home from school to protect the health of others. School communication decisions, including which families in the school community must be notified, are made by the DOH Epidemiology team, based on specific details of each case.

How do I prevent the spread of the flu?

Flu can easily spread from person to person. Here are several ways to help prevent the spread of flu.

- *Know the signs and symptoms of the flu.* Symptoms of the flu include fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit/37.8 degrees Celsius or greater), cough, sore throat, a runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, and feeling very tired. Some people may also vomit or have diarrhea.
- *Stay home if you are sick.* DCPS and DOH recommend that students or staff with flu-like symptoms stay at home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have fever or do not have signs of fever, without using fever-reducing drugs. Staying at home with a fever will reduce the number of people who may get infected. Students who are sick should not participate in any school activity, in school aftercare, or in the community except to seek medical care. Any children who show symptoms of flu while at school will be sent home.
- *Cover your cough and wash your hands.* In order to protect yourself and others, it is important to practice healthy hygiene habits. Some of these include covering your coughs and sneezes with tissues (and disposing of them properly) or with elbows when tissue is unavailable, and avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth to prevent spreading germs. You should wash your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. You should never share personal items like drinks, food, or unwashed utensils.
- *Get vaccinated.* Getting vaccinated is the best way to reduce the risk of getting the flu.

Common Pests

How does DCPS treat the threat of pests (rodents and insects) in a school?

All DCPS schools are on a regular schedule for preventive, extermination services. When concerns about rodents or bugs are identified at a school, DCPS and DGS work with school staff to identify the location of potential pests, complete a thorough inspection for entry points, fix any structural issues which may be a contributing factor (cracks or small holes in the walls, etc.), and bring in pest control services, including exterminators, if necessary.

Will I be notified if my school is being treated for pests?

Many things happen behind the scenes in a school—often in the evenings and on weekends—to make sure the building is ready for students and staff to focus on instruction. This includes cleaning, exterminating, building maintenance, etc. Typically, school communities are notified only of pest concerns when they reach a level that jeopardizes instruction or student or staff

wellness. While DCPS will continue to save community-wide notification for more disruptive concerns, school staff will be notified of follow-up steps when pest concerns are identified and targeted extermination is requested.

Who should I tell if I think my school has rodents or insects?

If you have concerns about potential pests at your school, please talk with your principal and/or school operations team. They will elevate the concerns to DCPS Central Office so that additional steps can be taken to evaluate and, if needed, provide additional resources to take care of the problem.

What is a bed bug?

Bed bugs are brown, flat, oval bugs. They do not fly or jump. Bed bugs usually bite skin that is exposed at night, often causing itchy red spots in rows or clusters. Bed bug bites can be annoying, but are not known to spread disease. More information on bed bugs, including pictures of them, can be found at <https://doh.dc.gov/service/bed-bugs-information>.

What does DCPS do if a bed bug is suspected at school?

It is very unlikely for bed bugs to be spread or to continue to live at a school, but if a bed bug is suspected, it is easy to spot, catch, and kill. If a bed bug is identified at school, the school nurse works with the Department of Health (DOH) to provide impacted students or families with information and possible resources to get rid of the bed bugs at home. In the rare case of a concern for infestation in a school, DCPS works with DGS to secure pest control services.

How are bed bugs spread?

Bed bugs usually live near where people sleep. They most commonly bite humans at night, and hide in mattresses, cushions, bed frames, walls, and floor boards during the day. They can hide in clothing or belongings.

How can I prevent bed bugs?

To identify bed bugs in your home, look for brown spots on bed linen and/or mattress seams. You can also look for small oval brown insects on beds or chairs. More information on inspecting your home for bed bugs can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/bedbugs> or <https://doh.dc.gov/service/bed-bugs-information>.

Will bed bugs make my student sick?

While a nuisance, bed bugs are not known to transmit diseases or cause illness. Students should not be excluded from school because of bed bugs.

What should I do if I detect bed bugs at home?

Don't panic, but don't delay. Delays in treatment can make control more difficult. Get an expert to identify pests if found. Carpet beetles, fleas, ticks, and small cockroaches can be mistaken for bed bugs. If bed bugs are confirmed, notify your landlord or a pest control professional.

How will I know if someone has bed bugs in my school?

Our first priority is protecting the privacy and safety of our students. If a student is identified with bed bugs, steps are taken to ensure the student's family is connected with resources to help. Because bed bugs tend to be isolated and are unlikely to spread within a school, DCPS does not typically notify the school community of the identification of a bed bug found at the school. Most often, the bed bug has traveled to school on a human's clothing or bag.

What does DCPS do if lice are suspected at a school?

Students who show signs of having lice (scratching head, presence of small bites on neck or around hairline, appearance of small bugs in hair) should be taken to the nurse for a lice check. If lice are identified, the school nurse will notify the student's family of the presence of lice and provide instructions for treatment. Per the DCMR (<http://tinyurl.com/z957xe2>), students should not be sent home or excluded from school. This is consistent with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Families should begin treatment after school on the day lice are identified. Students should return to school the next day after treatment has started, with a note from their parent/guardian saying treatment has started.

How will I know if someone has lice in my school?

The school nurse will provide guidance from the Department of Health on how broadly the presence of lice should be communicated to a school community, based on the number and age of students presenting with lice. Usually, notification is sent just to the families of other students in the classroom, and parents are encouraged to do a regular head check on their students for the next two weeks. When a large number of students in different grades are presenting with lice, a school-wide message may go out.

What can I do to prevent the spread of lice?

Lice crawl from head to head; they do not fly. Teach students not to share hats, combs, headbands, etc. High fives should be encouraged, rather than hugs. If there is any concern about lice, limit activities where heads may be together for an extended period of time, such as group work where students put their heads together over a single worksheet, etc.

When a student is identified with lice, will the nurse do classroom-wide head checks?

Classroom-wide head checks are generally not effective at preventing the spread of lice. Any student suspected of having lice should be examined by the nurse. Also, any parent, guardian, or teacher who does not know how to check for lice can seek guidance from the school nurse.

Questions?

I have concerns about my child's health. What should I do?

If you have any concerns about your child's health, please contact your child's medical provider. If you need assistance finding a medical provider, please contact the member services number

found on the back of your health insurance card. If you need health insurance, please visit www.dchealthlink.com.

I have questions about the information in this document. Who should I contact?

For questions about school cleaning, extermination, and other building maintenance concerns, please contact schooloperations.dcps@dc.gov.

For questions about DCPS Health and Wellness policies and procedures, please contact Diana Bruce, DCPS Director of Health and Wellness, at Diana.Bruce@dc.gov or (202) 442-5103, or Valentine Breitbarth, Manager of Health Services, at Valentine.Breitbarth@dc.gov or (202) 719-6555.