

GRATIOT COUNTY

Letters sent home as schools deal with illnesses

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With students in various school districts dealing with illnesses, the Mid-Michigan District Health Department wants to educate people on how they can stay healthy.

On Friday, the Mid-Michigan District Health Department sent out a letter describing symptoms of illnesses such as the stomach flu, and influenza.

“While several viruses can cause (the stomach flu), norovirus is the most common,” the department said. “People with norovirus experience nausea, abdominal cramping, vomiting, and diarrhea 12 to 48 hours after being exposed.”

It is extremely contagious and easily spread through food, by person-to-person contact, or contaminated surfaces.

“In most cases, people fully recover from norovirus, but sometimes hospitalization is required,

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especially for the very young or elderly," the department said. "People with norovirus-like symptoms should stay home from school or work until they are symptom-free for 48 hours and should not prepare or serve food to others."

For more information, contact the health department's Gratiot County office at (989) 875-3681.

School districts in mid-Michigan recently have been dealing with an influx of students out with sicknesses.

Shepherd Public Schools had a higher-than-normal number of students out with sicknesses as of earlier in the week of Feb. 24, according to superintendent Claire Bunker, but she could not provide specific numbers.

"We have no idea how many are out with the flu," Bunker said. "We cannot ask people why their kids are out."

On Feb. 20, she said 80 percent of students were in attendance district-wide.

"To say exactly how many are out with the flu, I can't tell you because I don't

know," Bunker said. "I don't know if I have higher numbers in the winter than the past."

Although she did say the district has "increased numbers" of students out sick than compared to last week. We have increased numbers this week as compared to last week.

As of Feb. 20, Bunker said 83 percent of Shepherd Elementary School students were in attendance; 82 percent at Shepherd Middle school, 93 percent at Winn Elementary and 90 percent at Shepherd High School.

The Michigan Department of Education requires that 75 percent of a school's student population be present in order to achieve a school day. Also, Ashley Community Schools closed on Feb. 16 and 17 due to illness, according to principal Traci Gavenda.

"Yesterday (Monday) we had 17 percent of students out and faculty we were OK," Gavenda said. "When you hit that 20 percent and trying to, with the substitute shortage, trying to fill those classes, it made it difficult."

Parents at Alma Public School received a letter on Feb. 16 from the Mid-Michigan Health Department regarding viral illnesses such

as influenza.

"As far as Alma goes, we are monitoring our absences," said interim superintendent Donalynn Ingersoll. "At this point in time, we have not had an increase in absence issues due to flu."

Ithaca Public Schools superintendent Charmian Fletcher said on Feb. 21 that the district had, throughout the previous week, seen an increase in illness-related student absences

"The student absenteeism has not been at the level to impact a school closure," Fletcher said.

However, in response, the district sent home a letter to parents of students at South Elementary and North Elementary and posted the letter on social media for the Ithaca Junior/Senior High School on Feb. 17.

Mt. Pleasant Public Schools superintendent Mike Pung said on Feb. 21 that the district has seen a small "uptick" in illness-related absences.

"But nothing that would warrant us to take any action in terms of shutting buildings down," Pung said.

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