

# Community-level Influenza Rates Predict Student Absences in Schools During Cold and Flu Season



EveryDay Labs



## Background and Objective

Children are exposed to viruses and bacteria both at home and at school. Inevitably, children then get sick and have to miss some school days. On average, children get sick from respiratory viruses about 6–8 times per year<sup>1</sup>. While schools cannot prevent students from getting sick while at home, they can help prevent the spread of illness-causing germs at school. It is critical for schools to help keep children healthy, as high rates of illness-related absences can lead to school closures, impacting both funding and student learning. In the 2024–2025 school year, there were entire school districts in at least 10 states that closed due to influenza outbreaks.<sup>2</sup> One prevention measure schools can control is daily cleaning and disinfection of high-touch surfaces and desks during the school day in addition to standard cleaning and disinfecting after school. However, increasing cleaning and disinfecting constantly can be time-consuming for teachers and staff, and predicting large flu outbreaks that affect attendance is challenging.

We evaluated the link between community-level peaks of influenza with peaks in student illness-related absences to provide guidance on when to perform during the day cleaning and disinfecting in schools.

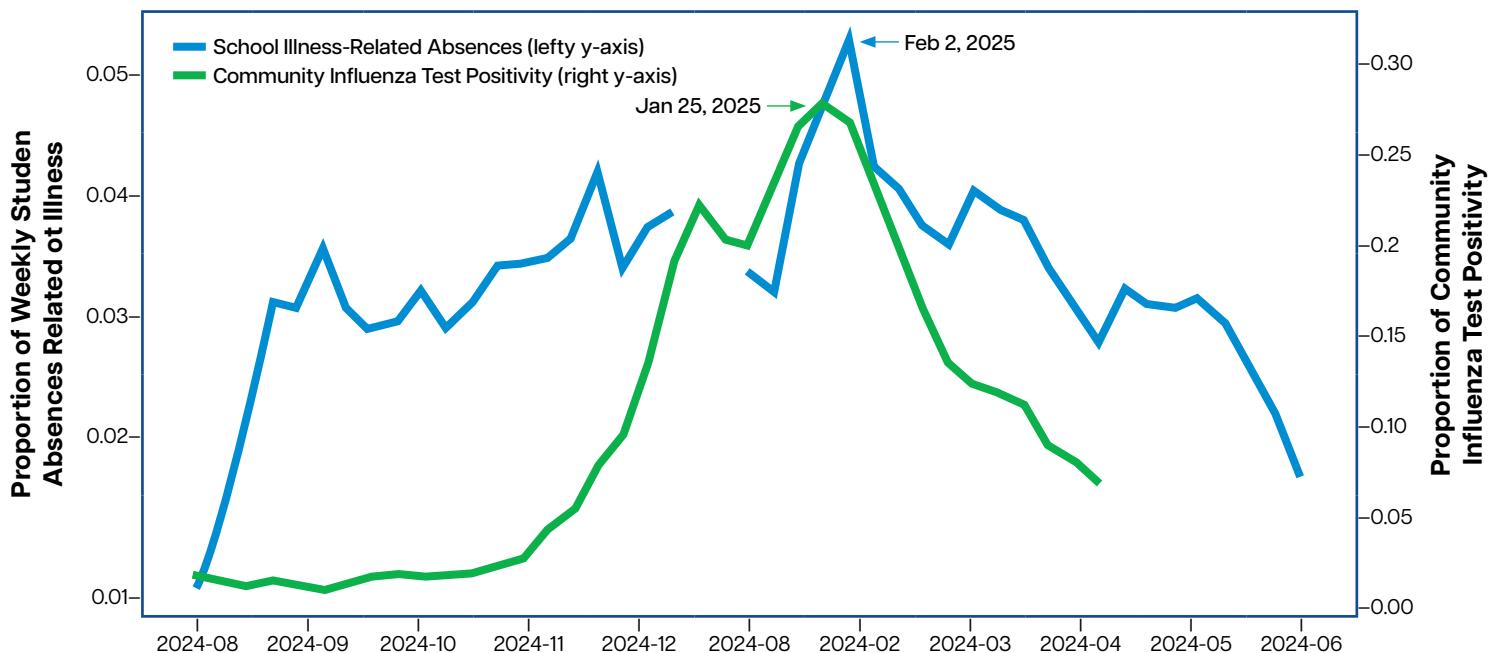
## Methods

We partnered with Everyday Labs, an organization that helps school districts increase student attendance through tracking absences and sending reminders to parents to help them plan to get their children to school. Using data from Everyday Labs from 6 California school districts covering both Northern and Southern California over the 2024–2025 school year, we compared student illness-related absence data with California state-wide community level influenza test positivity rates.<sup>3</sup>

## Community-level Influenza Rates Help Predict Student Absences

Community-level influenza rates overlapped with student illness-related absences across all 6 school districts. The peak day for student absences from school was 1 week behind flu rates in the broader community. While student illnesses fluctuate significantly throughout the school year with a baseline level of students absent due to illness, the major increase in illness-related absences in January and February can largely be attributed to influenza.

## Community Levels of Flu Peak 1 Week Before Student Illness-related Absences Across 6 School Districts



## Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on our analysis, community influenza rates are the greatest predictor of student illness-related absences during cold and flu season. Student illnesses reach their highest level at least one week AFTER flu peaks in the community.

Schools can use this knowledge to monitor influenza activity in the community. Some ways to accomplish this include: contacting the local public health department for information to find flu rates; or looking at CDC's FluView<sup>4</sup> regularly to see how flu is tracking in their community. We recommend schools monitor rates of influenza in their communities and implement interventions when influenza rates start to rise, including an increased focus on good hand hygiene at school, implementing cleaning and disinfecting in classrooms during the day with disinfecting wipes, wearing masks when possible, and sending letters home to parents to encourage them to take the same precautions.

Additionally, we recommend providing teachers with disinfecting wipes to use in their classrooms during the day. Disinfecting wipes are a simple and efficient tool for teachers to help combat viruses like influenza on hard non-porous surfaces.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, refer to our [School Wellness Toolkit](#) for resources and information on areas to target for cleaning and disinfecting in schools.

### References:

1. CDC. Common colds: Protect yourself and others. 2021
2. "Flu is so bad right now that schools across the country are closing". Today. Feb 2025. <https://www.today.com/health/cold-flu/flu-school-closures-2025-rncn9071>
3. California Department of Public Health. California Respiratory Virus Dashboard. 2024–2025. <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/RespiratoryVirusReport.aspx>
4. CDC FluView <https://www.cdc.gov/fluview/index.html>
5. CloroxPro. "Clorox wipes: Fight Cold & Flu Viruses Efficiently". 2023. <https://www.cloroxpro.com/resource-center/clorox-disinfecting-wipes-an-efficient-way-to-combat-cold-and-flu-viruses/>



For more information, contact your  
Clorox sales representative.  
Call: 1-800-492-9729  
Visit: [www.cloroxpro.com](http://www.cloroxpro.com)

© 2025 Clorox Professional Products Company,  
1221 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94612.  
NI-66777