

INFORMATION FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS ON SWINE INFLUENZA A (H1N1)

This information sheet gives general information about swine flu as well as addressing questions that may arise in schools.

This updated information sheet recognises the change in policy from 'containment' to a treatment-led approach given the community spread of the virus.

It particularly addresses what should be done if a child develops flu-like symptoms while at school.

GENERAL INFORMATION

What is swine flu?

- Swine flu is a respiratory illness caused by a new strain of the Influenza virus which has been named pandemic (H1N1) 2009 by the World Health Organisation.

What are the symptoms of swine flu?

- The symptoms of swine flu are similar to the symptoms of normal, human seasonal flu and include:
 - i. fever;
 - ii. fatigue;
 - iii. coughing;
 - iv. sore throat;
 - v. headache;
 - vi. runny nose;
 - vii. pains in the limbs or the joints.
 - viii. Some people with swine flu have also reported vomiting and diarrhoea.

How is Swine Flu treated?

If the illness is mild and there are no underlying risk factors then it can often be managed like normal flu by staying in bed and taking over the counter preparations.

However those with underlying conditions and with more serious disease should stay at home and telephone their GP or GP out of hours service for advice.

It is important that they do not go to their GP's surgery or to an accident and emergency department, but that they stay at home where, if necessary, they will be visited by a doctor.

INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS

Questions that may arise in schools.

Q1: Does swine flu particularly affect children and young people?

A1: Swine flu is particularly affecting children and young adults. Children are proving to be highly efficient carriers of the swine flu virus and schools provide the perfect environment for it to spread. There is also some evidence that there is less natural resilience to the virus in children and young people.

Q2: Will there be a vaccine for swine flu?

A2: The development of a vaccine for swine flu is well underway. However, it is not possible to say exactly when the vaccine will be made available because of the extensive tests that need to be undertaken to ensure its safety and effectiveness. It is anticipated that the vaccine will be available in October. The first groups to be vaccinated will be those of all ages, including children, with underlying risk factors. At present there are no specific plans to vaccinate all children, however this is still being considered and we will keep you informed of any developments.

Q3: What action should be taken if a child develops flu-like symptoms while at school?

A3: If a child develops flu-like symptoms at school, arrangements should be made for them to be taken home as soon as possible. While waiting, they should be placed in a suitable area, such as a medical room or small office (in order to reduce the chance of spreading infection to other children), but where they can be kept under observation.

Their parents should be advised to take the child straight home and if necessary to telephone their GP or GP out-of-hours service.

Q4: Should the school close if there are children and young people with swine flu?

A4: No. School closures are not recommended at this time because the virus is becoming increasingly widespread in the community. People are likely to be repeatedly exposed to the virus in their every day lives - so that closing the school will no longer be effective in slowing the spread of the virus as people could still be exposed outside the school.

In some special circumstances, for example a school with children who are particularly vulnerable to infection or because there are insufficient staff members, a decision may be made to close the school. However, it is important to point out that swine flu has, to date, been a relatively mild illness. As far as possible schools should plan to manage 'business as usual'.

Q5: Should children who have had contact with a known case of swine flu be kept away from school?

A5: No. As long as they are well and not suffering from flu-like symptoms, there is no reason for these children to be kept away from school and they can carry on with their normal routine. They should, however, be vigilant for flu symptoms and, at the first signs of these, should stay at home and, if necessary, telephone their GP or GP out-of-hours service for advice.

Q6: What can schools and parents do to slow the spread of infection?

A6: By practising good hygiene everyone can play their part and help to reduce the spread of all viruses, including swine flu:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of virus from your hands to face or to other people;
- Clean hard surfaces (e.g. door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product;
- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible;
- Dispose of dirty tissues promptly and carefully;
- Make sure children follow this advice.

Q7: Should hand sanitisers be provided in schools?

A7: What is most important is that all schools have proper hand washing and drying facilities in their toilets at all times, including hot and cold water, liquid soap and paper towels or hot air dryers. It is not necessary to provide hand sanitisers. However, should a school choose to do so, it is important to note that they are not a substitute for good hand washing facilities.

Q8: Is it safe for pregnant teachers to continue to teach pupils, if a pupil(s) or another member of staff in school, has tested positive for Swine Flu or have come into close contact with a positive case?

A8: It is important not to consider pregnant women as a group apart. Many of the issues relating to them will apply to those in other 'at-risk' groups. The advice to those in the other at-risk groups would also, therefore, apply to pregnant women.

The key to managing this group is to ensure that those in the at-risk groups, including pregnant women, are aware of the signs and symptoms of influenza so that they can seek early medical advice or assessment and, if indicated, treatment.

Once it is ubiquitous in the community, pregnant women are just as likely to be exposed to influenza in the community as their workplace. It is sensible for pregnant women to avoid close contact with people who have symptoms of the flu. In the context of pregnant teachers, the emphasis should be on ensuring that symptomatic children are identified, isolated and sent home. Good personal hygiene should be applied whenever possible.

The key to risk assessment in the workplace is whether there is an excess risk as compared to that faced by the ordinary population in the local community. In summary, for pregnant women and other people in the at-risk groups there is not an overall excess risk associated with teaching compared to the risks that they face in everyday life in the community.

Q9: Is it safe for teachers to return to work following illness, if a pupil(s) or another member of staff in school has tested positive for Swine Flu?

A9: The previous answer does, as stated, apply to all those in "at risk" groups and would therefore apply to anyone returning to work following illness.

Q10: Where is further information available?

The swine flu Public Helpline will operate between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday on 0800 0514 142.

More general information can be obtained from various websites, including:

Public Health Agency
www.publichealth.hscni.net

Health Protection Agency
www.hpa.org.uk

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

The Department of Education
www.deni.gov.uk

The World Health Organization
www.who.int

Teachernet
www.teachernet.gov.uk

The official government website for citizens – [NI Direct.gov.uk](http://NI.Direct.gov.uk)