SWINE FLU

ADVICE FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CARERS WITH CHILDREN AT SCHOOL

AUGUST 2009

INTRODUCTION

- **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, GP out of hours service or telephone the Swine Flu Helpline: 0800 0514 142 for advice.

The Public Health Agency (PHA) advise 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.

ADVICE FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CARERS

1. The Department of Education (DE) and its education partners, including the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) have worked closely together to provide schools and parents with advice and guidance, since the world wide outbreak of Swine Flu earlier this year.

2. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), together with the PHA, has monitored the development of the virus locally, as well as in GB and the south of Ireland over the summer months.

3. **The PHA has advised the Department of Education that all schools and the wider education sector, including pre-school settings should reopen for the new school year, as planned in late August/early September following the summer holidays.**

4. Schools in England, Wales and in the south of Ireland will also reopen as scheduled. Schools in Scotland have already reopened.

5. Parents and schools can play their part and help reduce the spread of all viruses, including swine flu by encouraging children to practise good personal hygiene by:

- Washing their hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of virus from their hands to their face or to other people;
- Covering their nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing and to use a tissue when possible;
- Disposing of used tissues quickly and carefully;
- and by cleaning hard surfaces (eg door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product.

6. Schools have been advised by the ELBs and CCMS to ensure that adequate supplies of liquid soap, hot and cold water and paper towels or hot air dryers are available for pupils and staff. It is not necessary for schools to provide hand sanitisers. However, should they wish to do so, it is important to note that they are not a substitute for good hand washing facilities.

7. Schools have been advised by the PHA, that should a child develop 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 a small office (in order to reduce the chance of spreading infection to other children), but where they can be kept under observation.

8. Parents should take their child straight home and if necessary telephone their GP or GP out-of-hours service.

9. If a child develops flu-like symptoms at home, they should be kept away from school until they recover and parents should, if necessary, seek medical advice as outlined at point 8 above.

10. Schools have been advised by the PHA that even if a pupil(s) is confirmed as having swine flu, the school should normally remain open. The swine flu 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.

11. 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 have been advised to plan to manage for 'business as usual' and any closure will be the exception rather than the rule.

12. The PHA advises that the development of a vaccine for swine flu is underway and will be tested before it is administered to the priority groups announced by the DHSSPS. Included in the first groups to be vaccinated will be those of all ages, including children, <u>with underlying risk factors</u>. At present there are no specific plans to vaccinate all children, however this is still being considered and parents and schools will kept informed of any developments.