



7 July 2009

SWINE FLU AND SCHOOLS – ADVICE FOR THE PUBLIC

Swine flu is a virus that is particularly affecting children and young adults. Children are proving to be highly efficient carriers of the swine flu (H1N1) virus and schools provide the perfect environment for it to spread.

There are lots of children with flu-like symptoms in the school. Why is the school not being advised to close?

School closures and the distribution of antiviral medicines for prevention are not recommended at this time because the virus is widespread within the community. People are likely to be repeatedly exposed to the virus in their every day lives - closing a school would not help to slow 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 – then school closures might still be recommended.

Isn't it better for my child to catch this now to develop some immunity in case this comes back more seriously?

This is good evidence that in the majority of swine flu patients the disease is generally mild, but it is also proving severe in a small minority of cases. It is preferable to avoid exposure to the virus if possible, which also helps to protect higher-risk groups from unnecessary risk. However, children should not be kept off school if they are well and their school is open.

What should I do if my child has symptoms of swine flu?

If you think your child may have swine flu, you should check their symptoms on www.nhs.uk, call NHS Direct (0845 46 47) or call the Swine Flu information line on 0800 1 513 513. If you are still concerned, you should call your GP, who can provide a diagnosis over the phone.

If your child has the signs and symptoms of swine flu – fever, fatigue, lack of appetite, coughing, sore throat, pain in muscles and joints, headache and chills and in some cases vomiting and diarrhoea - you should keep your child away from school until they have recovered and are free of symptoms.

If your child is prescribed antiviral medicines for treatment, they should also stay at home until they have finished the course. This is to avoid spreading the infection as much as possible.

What can schools and parents do to slow the spread?

By practising good hygiene everyone can play their part and help to reduce transmission 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.

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