



Health Protection Agency

West Midlands North

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Dear Head Teacher

Re: Swine Flu Treatment Phase- Implications For Schools

As you are no doubt aware that on 2nd July 2009 the Secretary of Health announced that England will be moving into a new “Treatment” phase in the response to the flu pandemic. I would like to take this opportunity to explain how this affects the management of swine flu cases amongst the staff or pupils in the school.

In line with the current treatment only policy in the UK, school closures and the distribution of antiviral medicines for prevention are no longer normally recommended due to the virus being widespread within the community. This means that people are likely to be repeatedly exposed to the virus in their every day lives so such precautions would now be ineffective.

The most important advice which has been given to the parents of children who have signs and symptoms of swine flu is that they should keep their children away from school and any other institution (such as A&E or general practice) until they have recovered and are free of symptoms. If parents need advice in terms of supporting their child, they should ring NHS Direct in the first instance. If children are prescribed antiviral drugs 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. If anyone is concerned about flu-like symptoms they should phone their GP or NHS Direct on 0845 4647 for further advice. Similar advice would be applicable to affected members of staff.

We are aware that nearer the end of the term the schools have organized activities such as visits by the children moving into high schools, summer fetes, sports days and evening performances etc. The risk of contracting swine flu inside the school is no greater than that of being exposed to it in your every day life.

If people who are suffering from flu like illness behave responsibly and stay away from such gatherings as well as keeping symptomatic children off school there is no reason why these programmes cannot proceed as planned.

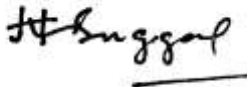
Finally if you observe a significant increase in absenteeism amongst staff and pupils, please report it to your contact in Local Educational Authority, who in turn would ensure that the Local Health Protection Unit is aware of this and advise you if any further actions are necessary.

There are various measures that people can use to reduce the spread of infection. General infection control practices and good respiratory hand hygiene can help to reduce transmission of all viruses:

- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible.
- Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully.
- Washing your hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to your face or to other people.
- Cleaning hard surfaces (such as door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product.
- Making sure your children follow this advice.

Further information is also available online on www.nhs.uk, or through the Swine Flu information line on 0800 1513 513. Alternatively, see the Health Protection Agency's website at www.hpa.org.uk/swineflu.

Yours sincerely



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Director
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