

The latest guidance on Swine Flu

from the Health and Safety Team

Despite the decline in media coverage, swine flu remains an ongoing problem; **we are in regular contact with our health colleagues and they have told us that they would like schools to help reinforce the flu message** by getting out information to pupils and their parents/guardians in the autumn term.

The Health Protection Agency (HPA) has drafted **a letter for schools to send to parents**, the key points of which are:

- the virus is now widespread in the community - although for most it remains a mild disease
- **school closures and distributing anti-viral medicine** as a preventive measure (that is to contacts of a pupil with swine flu) **are no longer recommended**
- **parents of children with flu-like symptoms are asked to keep them away from school** until they have recovered and are free from symptoms - to help stop it spreading
- various measures can help reduce the spread of the disease; infection control and good hygiene includes:
 - **covering your nose and mouth** when coughing and 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 children follow this advice

The Health and Safety Team will send schools a copy of the letter as soon as the final version is available.

School closures

HPA have indicated that because of the widespread prevalence of swine flu, they are unlikely to recommend school closures to combat further spread of the disease. However, they have provided a draft letter to parents in case schools have to close for operational reasons, eg if large numbers of staff are absent with swine flu; although any decision to close the school will remain with the Head in these circumstances.

In the unlikely event that a school has to close, the school must let the Health and Safety Team know without delay. We also need to know when the school reopens – this information has been requested by DCSF to ensure the Government's national picture is kept up to date. Please also ensure that you notify the Communications Team on 01922 686297 of any school closure.

Health records

In addition to the above, the HPA have asked us to ensure that each school has up to date health information on pupils so that any who are vulnerable to swine flu can easily be identified.

Most schools already collect data on pupils' health as part of the school's admission procedure; however, this may not always be the case and schools may not store the data they have appropriately or keep it up to date. Consequently, we would ask schools to ensure that they include a few basic health questions on their admissions/emergency details form:

- does the pupil have any short or long term medical conditions?
- does the pupil have a chronic condition that would leave them more vulnerable to infection?
- is the pupil on any regular medication?

We also ask schools to ensure this information is stored in the appropriate medical section of their pupil databases ('SMS' or 'Facility'), rather than the general notes section - storing data in the correct section means information is easier to access and analyse.

For Health and Safety Advice

If you require any further clarification on swine flu or advice on any other health and safety matter, please do not hesitate to contact one of the Health and Safety Team on **Tel: 01922 686497**

Vaccination

Finally, HPA have indicated that children have not been included in the initial priority groups for vaccination when the vaccine becomes available in the autumn - unless they have serious underlying health issues. We will keep headteachers informed as and when further information is received.