



**West Midlands East Health Protection Unit  
Coventry and Warwickshire**

**Swine Flu-  
Advice for schools, nurseries and other childcare settings**

**Frequently asked questions**

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

Most cases of the illness have so far been mild, but in some cases it has proven severe. The common symptoms of swine flu are fever more than 38°C, sore throat, cough, runny nose, headache, aching limbs and feeling lethargic. Some cases have also had diarrhoea and vomiting.

The swine flu pandemic in the UK has now entered into “treatment phase” which means that there is wide-spread transmission of the disease in the community

This leaflet provides advice on how you can slow down the spread of disease.

**What is the HPA policy on school closures?**

School closures and the distribution of antiviral medicines for prevention are not routinely advised during the pandemic as these measures are not thought to be effective when virus is also spreading in the community.

In some special circumstances – for example, a school with children who are particularly vulnerable to infection – then school closures might still be recommended.

Schools may also decide to close if high numbers of staff are off sick with flu and the school cannot operate safely. This would be a decision made by the school for operational reasons and not on health grounds.

**Who gets antiviral medication?**

Antiviral medication is offered to people who have been clinically assessed as having swine flu by a health professional. Antivirals are now not offered routinely to contacts of cases.

**Is vaccination available?**

Vaccination for swine flu is not yet available, but is expected this autumn.

### **Isn't it better for the children to catch the flu now and develop some immunity in case this comes back more seriously in the autumn?**

Whilst most cases of the illness have been mild, there have also been a small number of severe cases.

It is preferable to avoid exposure to the virus if possible, which also can help protect high-risk groups (those with underlying illnesses or pregnant women) from unnecessary risk.

### **Should children be kept away from school to protect them from the virus?**

Children should not be kept off school if they are well and their school is open. As swine flu is now spreading in communities outside schools, exclusion of children from school is unlikely to be effective in preventing infections.

### **What can schools and parents do to slow the spread?**

Anyone who has the beginnings of what might seem to be a flu-like illness should stay at home and contact their GP or NHS Direct (0845 46 47) by phone for advice. They should not go to school or work or attend healthcare settings. They should stay off school or work and away from anyone who might be vulnerable until the symptoms have gone and if they have been treated, they should complete their course of antiviral medication (usually 5 days).

Good hygiene is important in preventing spread:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water
- Clean hard surfaces frequently
- Cover nose and mouth when coughing using disposable paper tissue.
- Dispose used tissues promptly and then wash your hands before touching anything or anyone else.

### **Where can I obtain more information on swine flu?**

More information on swine flu is available from the swine flu information line 08001513 513, NHS website [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) or the Health Protection Agency website [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)