

8 September 2009

Dear Parent/Carer

Latest swine flu guidelines

I am writing to update you with the latest information on the current swine flu pandemic. It is hoped that the effects of the pandemic will be minimal this term, nevertheless, we have put plans in place to ensure we are prepared and it is important that all parents/carers are aware of the correct actions to take and where to go for guidance, should the need arise.

As you may be aware, the Government has moved to a treatment phase to manage the current swine flu pandemic. This means that the NHS is now focussing its efforts on treating people who have the virus.

School disruptions/closures

The updated Government guidance on schools is that they will not close because of individual cases of swine flu. However, schools may need to take the decision to close if local circumstances warrant it, eg if a significant number of staff are ill. This decision would be made as a last resort and only if the school is unable to guarantee the safety of pupils, based on a risk assessment.

If we do experience staff shortages due to the pandemic, there could be some disruption to the normal school timetable. Temporary arrangements may be required to ensure the school is able to stay open. We will try to keep any disruption to a minimum and keep you updated if this situation arises.

It is important that we have the correct contact details for all parents and carers, so we can keep you informed of any disruptions and contact you if your child falls ill during the day. Please can you advise any changes to the contact details that we hold for you.

For the latest information on emergency school closures visit <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/schoolclosures>.

Symptoms

Although I realise you may be concerned about the spread of swine flu, I would like to reassure you that there is no cause for alarm. The most common symptoms of swine flu are fever, sore throat, diarrhoea, headache, feeling generally unwell and a dry cough - in other words, symptoms very similar to ordinary seasonal flu. Most people recover within a week, even without anti-viral treatment.

Although symptoms have generally proved mild, a small number of patients will develop more serious illness. Many of these people have other underlying health conditions that put them at increased risk.

The advice from the NHS is that, unless you have flu-like symptoms, there is no need to stop your normal everyday activities, such as going to work or school.

If your child is ill

If you feel your child is displaying flu like symptoms, they should stay at home. Contact the National Pandemic Flu service for an assessment. You can either telephone the Service on 0800 1 513 100 or use the on-line assessment tool at www.pandemicflu.direct.gov.uk. Please inform the school, as per normal absence reporting procedures, on 02392 465531.

Prevention

Although the focus is now on treatment, there are still steps we can all take to help prevent swine flu from spreading. Please follow good practice hygiene advice from the NHS, which asks that people 'catch it, bin it, kill it' when they sneeze or cough. This means you should:

- catch your cough or sneeze in a tissue;
- throw the tissue in the bin quickly;
- wash your hands regularly with soap and water, or waterless hand hygiene products; and
- clean hard surfaces (like door handles and remote controls) frequently with a normal cleaning product.

Latest advice

To read the latest official advice and find out about the simple steps you can take to help protect yourself and others visit www.nhs.uk or call the Swine Flu Information Line on 0800 1 513 513.

Further information about swine flu can also be found on the Health Protection Agency website www.hpa.org.uk and in the leaflet 'Swine flu and schools' - http://www.hpa.org.uk/servlet/ContentServer?c=HPAweb_C&cid=1247125501005&pagename=HPAwebFile which answers some specific questions related to schools.

You can also find some guidelines in the government leaflet about swine flu that was distributed to your household. The leaflet is also available online at: www.direct.gov.uk/en/Swineflu/DG_177831.

Please keep in touch with the latest news from the school by visiting our website at www.millrythe.org.

Yours sincerely

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Headteacher