

Dear Parent

Swine Flu in Suffolk Schools and Early Years settings

I am writing at the request of the Local Authority to provide an update on the management of swine flu in schools and early years settings.

As you know, this new flu virus was first found in Mexico in April and from there has spread to many countries in the world. So far, in Suffolk, we have been much luckier than some parts of the UK in that we have had relatively few cases. We are, however, now starting to see some cases in schools and, because this flu virus seems to pass fairly easily from child to child, we may well see more in the run up to the end of the summer term.

When the swine flu virus was first found in the UK, the policy was to close schools if a case was discovered in a pupil and to offer antiviral drugs to other children in the school. This made sound sense at the time, as doctors were not sure how severe this virus would be and we wanted to stop it spreading in the UK.

Two months later, we now know a lot more about the virus and, in particular, we know that it only causes a relatively mild illness in the vast majority of people who get it. These findings have led to a reassessment of the policy regarding school closure and it is now highly unlikely that public health doctors would advise the closure of a school if a pupil or member of staff was found to have swine flu. It is also very unlikely that other pupils would be offered antiviral drugs to try to prevent them getting swine flu – even if they were in the same class as someone who had swine flu. It is, however, still important that children who are ill with swine flu are kept away from school for a period of 7 days from the date that they develop symptoms.

In addition, parents should keep an eye on children who have had contact with a swine flu case at school, for a period of 7 days from the last contact. The symptoms to look out for are a high fever [temperature above 38 C] with a mixture of other flu like symptoms such as headache, aching muscles, cough, runny nose, sore throat and sneezing. Swine flu is very unlikely to develop after this 7 day incubation period and symptoms are most likely to start after 2 to 4 days.

Parents are advised to contact their doctor if their child does develop such symptoms after coming into contact with someone who has swine flu. There is, however, no need to keep a child away from school if they have not developed any symptoms, even if they have been in contact with a known case.

Yours faithfully

Dr Brian Keeble
Consultant in Public Health Medicine

Overleaf you will see additional advice from the Health Protection Agency.

Additional information from the Health Protection Agency

Dear parent/guardian

If a child is diagnosed by the GP as suffering from swine flu you can be assured that he/she is receiving the appropriate medical care and is recovering at home.

The Health Protection Agency, the local NHS primary care trust and local authority are aware of the likelihood of swine flu cases in schools and early years settings and have advised that, when a case is identified, no other actions are necessary and we will remain open as usual. We are working closely with the bodies in order to keep updated on the most recent developments.

If you or your child develops symptoms of flu-like illness the advice of the Health Protection Agency is to stay at home and contact your GP or NHS Direct on 0845 4647. They will then advise you accordingly. Please do let us know if your child is being treated for these symptoms.

Good basic hygiene can help to reduce transmission of all viruses, including swine flu. This includes:

- 1. Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible.*
- 2. Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully.*
- 3. 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.*
- 4. Cleaning hard surfaces (such as door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product.*
- 5. Making sure your children follow this advice.*

We will be taking hygiene precautions within the school.

For more information on swine flu call the national information line on 0800 1 513 513. Alternatively, visit the Health Protection Agency website at www.hpa.org.uk.