

# **ADVICE ABOUT FLU FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CARERS WITH CHILDREN AT SCHOOL–DECEMBER 2011**

## **What is flu?**

Flu is a respiratory illness caused by several strains of Influenza virus. These strains include H1N1 2009 (swine) flu and flu B.

## **Flu Vaccination**

This year's seasonal flu vaccination is effective against H1N1 (swine) flu and other strains of flu.

Seasonal flu vaccination is advised for all adults and children with the following conditions:

- a chronic chest condition such as asthma;
- a chronic heart condition;
- chronic liver disease;
- chronic kidney disease;
- diabetes;
- lowered immunity due to disease or treatment such as steroids or cancer therapy;
- a chronic neurological condition such as stroke, multiple sclerosis or a condition that affects your nervous system, such as cerebral palsy.

Pregnant women regardless of their stage of pregnancy, anyone aged 65 or over, anyone living in a residential or nursing home and main carers for an elderly or disabled person should also be vaccinated.

## **What are the symptoms of flu?**

The symptoms of flu often start suddenly and include:

- fever
- fatigue
- pains in the limbs or the joints
- coughing
- sore throat
- headache
- runny nose
- some people also have vomiting and diarrhoea.

## **How is Flu treated?**

Most people, including children, will recover within a few days. Resting and taking over the counter preparations such as paracetamol will help. Anyone with flu-like symptoms should stay at home, so as not to infect others, until feeling better.

Those with underlying conditions, or if feeling short of breath or very unwell should telephone their GP or GP out of hours service for advice. For these people, antiviral medication may be advised.

The Public Health Agency (PHA) advise it is important that patients do not go to an accident and emergency department unless absolutely necessary and urgent.

Schools have been advised by the PHA, that should a child develop flu-like symptoms at school, arrangements should be made for them to be taken home as soon as possible. While waiting, they should be placed in a suitable area, such as a medical room or a small office (in order to reduce the chance of spreading infection to other children), but where they can be kept under observation.

Parents should take their child straight home and if necessary telephone their GP or GP out-of-hours service.

If a child develops flu-like symptoms at home, they should be kept away from school until they recover and parents should, if necessary, seek medical advice.

### **Good Hygiene advice**

Parents and schools can help reduce the spread of all viruses by encouraging children to practise good personal hygiene by:

- Washing their hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of virus from their hands to their face or to others;
- Covering their nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing and to use a tissue when possible;
- Disposing of used tissues quickly and carefully;
- Cleaning hard surfaces (eg door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product.

Schools have been advised by the ELBs and CCMS to ensure that adequate supplies of liquid soap, hot and cold water and paper towels or hot air dryers are available for pupils and staff. It is not necessary for schools to provide hand sanitisers, however, should they wish to do so, it is important to note that they are not a substitute for good hand washing facilities.