



10th March 2016

Dear Head Teacher

### **Suspected outbreaks of respiratory/flu-like illness in schools**

Flu is circulating the community, as we expect at this time of year and we are receiving an increased number of calls from schools reporting outbreaks of respiratory / flu-like illness. This letter outlines simple advice about protecting children from these infections that are typical over the winter months. One of the circulating flu strains at present is H1N1 also known as Swine Flu. As this strain is now **not** a pandemic strain, it should be treated like any other circulating flu strain as outlined below.

### **Simple hygiene kills germs**

- Hand washing is essential. It is really important to encourage children to do this.
- It is best to supply warm soapy water and paper hand drying facilities.
- Ensure toilets are stocked with soap and disposable paper towels.
- Routine infection control practices in school and good cleaning practice.

Further information about germs and hand washing is available at: <http://www.e-bug.eu/>. It contains games and other information to help children learn how to prevent the spread of germs.

### **When can a child return to school?**

When a child is free of the symptoms of a flu-like illness they can return to school. This is usually about one week after the symptoms start. We understand that this can be difficult for parents with work commitments and childcare to manage. However, this will help us to reduce transmission of the infection.

## **Additional Information**

If you have absence levels over and above what you would normally expect and linked to a circulating infection in the school, please report this to PHE's Health Protection Team on 0300 3038162 and further advice will be provided. Additional information can be found on the PHE website <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england> and searching 'infection control schools.'

There is normally no reason to close a school during a seasonal outbreak. This can be discussed further with your Local Authority if required.

I hope this information is helpful to you. We appreciate the efforts you make to keep infections out of school.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Harrison', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Dr Sarah Harrison  
Deputy Director of Health Protection