



# Swine flu and schools in London

## Advice for the public

Swine flu is a virus that is particularly affecting children and young adults. Children are proving to be highly efficient carriers of the swine flu (H1N1) virus and schools provide the perfect environment for it to spread. The HPA provides advice to schools on whether they should close or stay open and also on measures schools can take to try to slow the spread of the disease. This leaflet aims to explain how we make our decisions and let you know how you can help to combat swine flu.

### **There are lots of children with flu-like symptoms in the school. Why is the school not being advised to close?**

The decision to close a school is made by the school and the local authority based on advice from the Health Protection Agency. The HPA would only recommend school closure if this would help to contain and lessen the spread of the virus.

As the flu virus is now circulating within the wider community, people could come into contact with it while mixing with friends and family outside of school. Closing the school would therefore not slow the spread of the virus so schools are being advised to remain open.

### **There are high absentee rates at the school – surely this must be a swine flu outbreak?**

Schools are closely monitoring absentee rates and are looking out for the symptoms of swine flu among pupils and staff.

### **Isn't it better for my child to catch this now to develop some immunity in case this comes back more seriously?**

There is good evidence that most swine flu patients the disease is mild. But it is also proving severe in a small minority of cases. It is preferable to avoid exposure to the virus if possible, which also helps to protect high-risk groups from unnecessary risk. However, children should not be kept off school if they are well and their school is open.

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

Our advice to people with flu-like symptoms remains the same. Anyone who has a fever and flu-like symptoms should stay at home and contact NHS Direct on **0845 4647** or their GP by phone for advice. They should not go to school or work, and should not attend health settings such as GP surgeries or hospital A&E departments. For more details call the swine flu information line on **0800 1513 513**. Everyone can play their part by practising good hygiene:

- Washing hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of virus from your hands to face or to other people.
- Cleaning hard surfaces (e.g. door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product.
- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible.
- Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully.
- Making sure children follow this advice.