

Swine Flu and Schools

Some frequently asked questions

1. What should I do if my child develops flu-like symptoms?

Your child should stay at home if he/she develops flu-like symptoms (including high temperature, cough, runny nose, sore throat, headache, joint/limb pains, diarrhoea or vomiting). They are advised to rest and drink plenty of fluids.

Any parent whose child experiences flu like symptoms should telephone their GP or NHS Direct on 0845 46 47. More general information about H1N1 can be obtained from the Department of Health public information line on Tel. 0800 1 513 513 or from the HPA website at www.hpa.org.uk.

2. What are the symptoms of swine flu?

The symptoms of swine influenza in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu that is seen traditionally in people during the winter months and can include fever, fatigue, lack of appetite, coughing and sore throat. Some people with swine flu have also reported vomiting and diarrhoea.

3. How are patients treated?

Confirmed cases of swine flu will usually be treated with antivirals. All those in close (household) contact with these cases may be given antivirals as a precautionary measure.

4. Why am I not getting antivirals?

Confirmed cases of swine flu will usually be treated with antivirals. All those in close (household) contact with these cases may be given antivirals as a precautionary measure.

There is no need for the close (household) contacts of people with no symptoms to be given antivirals.

5. My child has a confirmed case of swine flu – is it OK for him or her to return to school?

If your child has been confirmed with swine flu, has finished their course of antivirals and is no longer displaying symptoms, they can return to school.

6. A child has a confirmed case of swine flu – can he / she go outside and mix with other children?

If a child has been confirmed with swine flu, has finished their course of antivirals and is no longer displaying symptoms, they can resume normal activities.

7. Can family members of a confirmed case go to work or go out socially?

Anyone who is not having symptoms can continue their usual activities. If you have been given antivirals, you should take all the medicines prescribed.

8. Families with children at a school with confirmed swine flu cases may also have children at other schools – can they continue to attend?

If a child has been confirmed with swine flu, has finished their course of antivirals and is no longer displaying symptoms, they can return to school. Anyone who is not having symptoms can continue their usual activities.

9. If a child is well, are they still at risk?

A doctor may decide to offer people treatment with antivirals to help prevent infection with swine flu. This is a precautionary measure. While your child is taking antivirals, as long as they are well, they do not need to avoid contact with others and can carry on with normal activities. If your child does become unwell, please contact NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 for further advice.

10. Will a particular school close?

Decisions to close schools are taken on a case-by-case basis. If this is necessary then parents and staff will be contacted. Any decision will be taken with the advice and involvement of the Health Protection Agency.

11. If a school is closed, when will it reopen?

The HPA will advise on when the school should reopen and the school will then decide whether, when and how to reopen.

Pupils who have caught the flu and are now well again are not infectious to others and can return to school as normal. Any child or teacher still with symptoms should take all the antivirals given to them and stay at home until they feel better. We may see more confirmed cases in the coming days and weeks, but these are being treated appropriately and advised to stay at home if they still have symptoms.

People should be vigilant to the signs of flu which include high temperature, cough, headache, runny noses, joint/ limb pains, diarrhoea or sore throat. Remember: if children become unwell with flu, they should stay at home and should not attend school.

12. Should children be kept at home if there is a case of swine flu at school?

No, children should attend school as normal unless they develop symptoms. The Health Protection Agency advises that everyone sticks to their normal routine unless advised otherwise.

13. Are there any side effects of antiviral drugs?

In some cases antiviral medicine may cause side effects including nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach ache and headache but it is very important for people prescribed antiviral medicine to complete the course even if there are no symptoms and they start to feel better quickly.

14. How can friends and relatives help?

Friends and relatives can help by collecting medicines and other supplies for sick people and therefore help prevent the spread of the virus. It is also important that everyone maintains good basic hygiene, such as washing hands frequently with soap and water, cleaning hard surfaces (such as door handles) frequently using normal cleaning product and make sure your children also follow this advice. These simple measures can stop the spread of germs.

15. Do you know what caused the infection?

The HPA investigates all sorts of outbreaks, as is normal in an outbreak situation, by speaking to pupils and parents to establish further information on the likely source of infection. This will include investigating whether there are travel links to countries affected by swine flu or individuals who have previously been confirmed with the infection.

16. Is this swine flu virus contagious?

It has been found that this virus is contagious and it spreads between people, although it is not yet known how easily and further work is taking place to understand this fully.

17. What measures can I take to protect against infection?

General infection control practices and good respiratory hand hygiene can help to reduce transmission of all viruses, including the human swine flu. This includes:

- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible
- Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully
- Maintaining good basic hygiene, for example washing hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to face or to other people
- Cleaning hard surfaces (such as door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product
- Making sure your children follow this advice

18. What is the difference between seasonal influenza, avian influenza, swine influenza and an influenza pandemic?

Flu viruses are commonly circulating in the human and animal environment. Different strains can cause illness in humans, bird and pigs.

Seasonal flu is caused by flu viruses that are adapted to spread in humans (human influenza). Humans have some natural immunity to the strains that are in common circulation, and this immunity can be boosted by immunisation with a seasonal flu vaccine. Avian influenza is caused by influenza viruses adapted for infection in birds. Similarly, swine flu is caused by flu viruses adapted for infection in pigs.

These illnesses all cause the same respiratory symptoms. Sometimes, humans and animals can pass strains to each other, such as when humans become ill with avian or swine influenza, usually from direct contact with animals who are ill. Mixing of human and animal flu viruses can lead to the viruses changing with the ability to cause infection and spread in the human population. There may be little or no immunity in the human population to these new viruses.

An influenza pandemic is defined as a new influenza virus that spreads easily between humans. When new influenza viruses are introduced into the environment, humans don't have any natural immunity to protect against them. Therefore, there is a risk that that new influenza viruses could develop into a pandemic if the virus passes easily from human to human. We are not at this stage currently.

19. What do we do about travel plans overseas?

The Foreign and commonwealth office has made available guidance for travellers which can be found on <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/swine-flu>