

SWINE FLU MESSAGE TO SCHOOLS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

5 May 2009

The World Health Organization increased its human influenza pandemic alert level to 5 on 29 April. This means that a global pandemic is imminent.

Although there are as yet only small numbers of confirmed cases of swine flu in the UK, we need to prepare for the possibility of more cases in the UK over the coming weeks and months.

More investigation is needed to determine the severity of the disease and the ease with which it can spread. We therefore do not yet know how serious the pandemic will be in the UK. It could be relatively mild. All the confirmed cases in the UK so far have presented mild symptoms.

At this stage therefore all schools and early years and group child care settings should operate as normal.

This advice would continue to apply if the World Health Organization were to increase its pandemic threat level to 6.

Closures

There may be circumstances where localised closures of schools or early years and group child care settings are necessary to contain the spread of infection. Decisions in these cases will be taken locally on the basis of advice from local health protection teams.

It is too early to judge whether swine flu will be severe enough in the UK to lead to a Government decision to advise that all schools and settings in an area should close. Any decision to advise all schools and settings to close would be taken by the Government and communicated to schools through regional Government Offices who would inform Local Authority Chief Executives and Directors of Children's Services.

More information about how decisions about closing schools should be taken is set out in the Q&A brief at <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/pandemicQandA>.

Key Stage 2 Tests

We expect primary schools to go ahead as planned with the Key Stage 2 tests from 11 May. If any primary school has to close before or during test week they should notify, and seek further guidance from, the National Curriculum tests helpline on 08700 60 60 40 (or by emailing tests@qca.org.uk).

Public Examinations

If any schools are closed during the public examination period, it may be possible for the school to open so that pupils can take their examinations. The decision on this will be taken locally in discussion with the local health protection teams.

If this is not possible, the school will need to apply for what is known as 'special consideration' for the candidates affected. This allows an awarding body to award a grade where an examination cannot be taken, provided that there is sufficient evidence to make a reasonable judgement. This is the fairest possible approach for all candidates. More details about the arrangements for special consideration are set out in the Q&A at <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/pandemicQandA>.

Pandemic Flu Guidance

The Department has issued guidance to schools and local authorities on planning for and responding to pandemic flu available at www.teachernet.gov.uk/humanflupandemic.

As outlined in our guidance the key things that schools and early years and group child care settings should do to prepare are:

- Reviewing infection control procedures such as checking that children wash their hands frequently and that there are supplies of tissues and arrangements for quick and safe disposal

- Ensuring that parents' and carers' contact details are up to date.
- Considering where practical ways of keeping children's learning going if the school has to be closed for a period.

So for clarity

- Remain open and carry on as normal
- Encourage good hygiene
- Encourage parents to call NHS Direct if their children show any symptoms; NHS Direct will advise on further action.

The Government is monitoring the situation closely.

Further updates will be posted regularly at www.teachernet.gov.uk/humanflupandemic.

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