



PHE North West

Cheshire & Merseyside
Suite 3b, Cunard Building
Water Street
Liverpool L3 1DS

0344 225 0562 option 1
Fax: 0151 236 2488
candmhp@phe.gov.uk

Cumbria & Lancashire
Floor C, PO Box 100
County Hall
Preston PR1 0LD

0344 225 0562 option 2
Fax: 01772 251 789
clhpt@phe.gov.uk

Greater Manchester
2nd Floor, 3 Piccadilly Place
London Road
Manchester M1 3BN

0344 225 0562 option 3
Fax: 0161 236 1820
gmancHPU@phe.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/phe
[@PHE_NorthWest](https://twitter.com/PHE_NorthWest)

10th December 2019

Message to North West Schools from Public Health England - Seasonal Influenza (Flu)

Dear Headteacher

Seasonal Influenza

Across the North West we have been seeing increasing numbers of schools reporting flu-like illness in staff and pupils and we now have an increase in confirmed flu cases in the community. Flu symptoms come on very quickly and can include:

- a sudden fever – a temperature of 38C or above
- an aching body
- feeling tired or exhausted
- a dry cough
- a sore throat
- a headache
- difficulty sleeping
- loss of appetite
- diarrhoea or tummy pain
- feeling sick and being sick

For most healthy people flu is an unpleasant but self-limiting illness. However, some people can be more at risk of developing severe illness or complications including the following groups:

- those aged 65 years or over
- pregnant women
- those with a long-term medical condition – for example, diabetes or a heart, lung, kidney or neurological disease
- those with a weakened immune system – for example, because of chemotherapy or HIV

Advice on managing increased levels of illness

The most important steps in controlling increased levels of winter illnesses are:

Excluding pupils and staff who are unwell

- Please ensure that pupils and staff who are affected do not come to school.
- Adults and children who are affected by flu-like illnesses should stay off school until they have recovered and have not had a fever for at least 24 hours.
- Advise staff or students who are in an “at risk” group, to seek prompt medical assessment via NHS 111, by a GP or a nurse who will be able to provide further advice.
- Adults and children who are affected by diarrhoea and vomiting should stay off school until at least 48 hours after they last had diarrhoea or vomiting.

Encouraging good hand hygiene

- Hand-washing is an effective way to stop infections spreading.
- Please ensure that all pupils and staff frequently wash their hands with warm water and soap, particularly after using the toilet, after using a tissue to catch a cough or sneeze, and before eating.

Cleaning the environment

- In addition to making sure that any vomit or diarrhoea on school premises is promptly cleaned up according to your usual protocols, increasing general cleaning of the school environment can also help to reduce the spread of winter illnesses.
- For example, you may wish to ensure that there is twice-daily cleaning of areas (with particular attention to door handles, toilet flushes and taps) and communal areas where surfaces can easily become contaminated (such as handrails).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities/chapter-6-cleaning-the-environment>

Closure of schools

- We do not routinely advise that schools close when there are increased levels of diarrhoea, vomiting or flu-like illness. Closing schools does not usually provide any protection against catching these illnesses, as there are likely to be high levels of the same illness circulating in the community. Children and staff will still be at risk of catching the illness whether or not they are at school.
- Schools may choose to close for business continuity or staffing reasons; this will be at the discretion of the school management team. However, there is no need for a school to remain closed for public health reasons.

Flu vaccination

Vaccination is the best form of protection that we have against several types of seasonal influenza (flu).

Parents should be encouraged to continue to engage in the school-based immunisation programme and to attend mop-up clinics if they miss scheduled sessions due to illness.

Toddlers aged two and three, children and adults who are in risk groups for flu (including those aged 65 years and over, pregnant women, people with long term medical conditions or

weakened immune systems) should attend their GP or pharmacy for vaccination as soon as possible if they have not already been vaccinated.

Please report high levels of absences due to flu/flu-like illness to your local infection control team to access advice and support.

The information leaflet below can be shared with pupils, parents and staff if schools are concerned about increased absences from pupils / staff as a result of flu/ flu-like illness.

Further information is available at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/flu/>.

Yours faithfully



Dr Sam Ghebrehewet
Head of Health Protection – Cheshire & Merseyside
NW Health Protection Team
Public Health England

FLU-LIKE ILLNESS IN SCHOOLS INFORMATION FOR PUPILS, PARENTS AND STAFF

General hygiene

The spread of most infectious illnesses is reduced through good hand hygiene. Please ensure that you and your child wash your hands frequently with warm water and soap, particularly after using the toilet, after using a tissue to catch a cough or sneeze, and before eating. If you are in a place where you are unable to wash your hands wet wipes or hand gels can be used.

Influenza (Flu)

Flu and flu-like viruses spread easily between people from coughs and sneezes. They can live on hands and surfaces for up to 24 hours. Symptoms of flu may develop quickly and can include:

- sudden fever
- dry, chesty cough
- sore throat
- aching body
- headache
- tiredness
- diarrhoea or tummy pain
- nausea

For most healthy people flu is an unpleasant but self-limiting illness. However, some people can be more at risk of developing severe illness or complications including the following groups:

- those aged 65 years or over
- pregnant women
- those with a long-term medical condition – for example, diabetes or a heart, lung, kidney or neurological disease
- those with a weakened immune system – for example, because of chemotherapy or HIV

If you or your child are affected by flu-like illnesses please stay off school until recovered and not had a fever for at least 24 hours.

If you or your child are in an at-risk group AND develop symptoms of flu, please seek prompt medical assessment via NHS 111, by a GP or a nurse who will be able to provide further advice.

If you or your child are not in an at-risk group but develop flu like illness and are concerned about your symptoms, please consult NHS 111, your GP or nurse in the normal way.