

28 September 2022

Parent Update – Winter Illnesses

Dear Parents/Carers

As autumn and winter approach, it is likely that there will be increasing numbers of people affected by winter illnesses, such as diarrhoea and vomiting, influenza and scarlet fever. This letter provides advice for students, parents and staff on how to reduce the risk of catching these common bugs.

General hygiene

Handwashing is a highly effective way of preventing many infections from spreading. Students and staff should 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. As they are not effective against some germs which cause gastrointestinal illnesses, hand sanitiser gels are not a suitable substitute for handwashing after using the toilet.

Respiratory infections including influenza (flu) and COVID-19

Respiratory viruses such as flu and other flu-like illnesses spread easily between people from coughs and sneezes. Symptoms may develop quickly and can include sudden fever, a dry chesty cough, a sore throat, aching body, headache, tiredness, diarrhoea or tummy pain, and nausea. For most people, viral respiratory infections result in an unpleasant but self-limiting illness. However, some people are at risk of developing severe illness or complications, including older adults, pregnant women, those with a long-term condition or a weakened immune system, and those in long-term care facilities.

All children aged 5 to 15 years can now have the COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccinating children can reduce the risk of infection to your child and other they are in contact with.

There is more information on the COVID-19 vaccine for children at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-for-children/coronavirus-covid-19-vaccine-for-children-aged-5-to-15/>

The seasonal flu jab offers the best available protection against severe illness caused by the influenza virus. **All children and adults eligible for an NHS vaccination should take up this offer.** There is more information on the flu vaccine for children at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/child-flu-vaccine/>

If you or your child are in at at-risk group and develop symptoms of flu, you may require anti-viral medication. Please seek prompt medical assessment via NHS 111, a GP or a nurse who will be able to provide further advice.

If you or your child at in at at-risk group and have had recent contact with a confirmed influenza case and have not had the seasonal flu jab, anti-viral treatment may be advised. Please seek prompt advice via NHS 111, a GP or a nurse.

If you or your child are not in an at-risk group and develop symptoms of flu, and would like advice on managing these symptoms, please consult a pharmacist, NHS 111, or your GP or nurse in the usual way.

As with any respiratory illness, any child or staff member with these symptoms should stay off school until any fever has resolved and they are well enough to do their normal activities.

Diarrhoea and vomiting

It is not unusual for viruses which cause diarrhoea and vomiting to circulate among children, especially over the winter. If you or your child develop these symptoms and are concerned about them, please contact NHS 111 or your GP or nurse in the usual way.

Scarlet fever

Scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, though it typically needs to be treated with a course of antibiotics to minimise the risk of complications and reduce the spread to others. Scarlet fever is characterised by a fine red rash which typically appears first on the chest and stomach, rapidly spreading to other parts of the body. The skin can feel a bit like sandpaper, and the face and be flushed red by pale around the mouth. The rash often appears after or along with symptoms such as a sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting. Children who have recently had chickenpox are at high risk of a more severe course of illness if they catch scarlet fever. If you think you or your child has scarlet fever, please seek prompt medical assessment via NHS 111, or your GP or nurse.

COVID-19

It is possible that we will see an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases over the autumn and winter period. Vaccination offers the best available protection against severe illness caused by COVID-19. Anyone eligible for an NHS COVID-19 booster vaccination should take up this offer.

Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, a new continuous cough, a loss of or change to your sense of taste or smell, shortness of breath, feeling unusually tired, an aching body, a headache, sore throat, blocked or runny nose, a loss of appetite, diarrhoea and feeling or being sick. If you or your child develop these symptoms and are concerned about them, please contact NHS 111 or your GP or nurse in the usual way.

As with any respiratory illness, any child or staff member who develops these symptoms should stay off school until any fever has resolved and they are well enough to do their normal activities. Although most people are no longer eligible for COVID-19 testing, any child who happens to have a positive COVID-19 test should stay off school for at least three days from the date of the test, and any adult who happens to have a positive COVID-19 test should staff off school for at least five days from the date of the test.

School closures

The Health Protection Team **does not** frequently or routinely advise that schools close when there are increased levels of diarrhoea and vomiting, increased number of COVID cases, or increase numbers of cases of other winter illnesses. Closing schools does not usually provide substantial additional protection against catching illnesses which are commonly circulating in the community.

However, schools may need to close for other practical reasons, such as due to high levels of staff absence, or a need to facilitate additional cleaning. Any decision about school closures will be taken by the school's management team, and any queries regarding these should be addressed to the school.

Yours sincerely



Mrs J Owens
Principal