



15th November 2019

Dear parent/guardian,

Re: Recent illness in school

The North East Health Protection Team have been made aware that a number of children attending Willow Fields School Sunderland have reported recent illness with symptoms including fever, cough, diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting. Viruses including influenza (flu) and norovirus can present with symptoms such as these and are a common cause of illness at this time of year in the community and in schools. The purpose of this letter is to provide with some further information and advice about these illnesses.

Influenza (flu)

Flu and flu-like viruses spread easily between people from coughs and sneezes. They can live on hands and surface 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
- those resident in long term care facilities

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

If you or your child are in an at-risk group AND have not had the seasonal flu jab AND are concerned that you or your child have had contact with someone with flu, please seek prompt medical assessment by a GP, nurse or via NHS 111.

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 your GP or NHS 111 in the normal way.

Your child should not attend school if they have symptoms of flu and should only return once they have recovered.

The flu vaccine is the best form of protection we have, it reduces the risk of catching flu and spreading it to others and is available every flu season for at-risk groups and primary school children.

For more information about any of the above please visit <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/flu/>.

Viral gastrointestinal illnesses

It is not uncommon for viruses which cause vomiting and diarrhoea to circulate among children (for example norovirus, also known as the 'winter vomiting bug'). If your child develops vomiting or diarrhoea, it is important that they stay off school until 48 hours after they last vomited or passed diarrhoea. As always, please contact your GP or NHS 111 if you are concerned or need further advice on how to manage an illness.

Further information can be found at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/diarrhoea-and-vomiting/>.

General hygiene

The spread of most infectious illnesses is reduced through good hand hygiene. Please encourage your child to wash their 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 concerned about any of the information in this letter or would like to discuss it further, please contact my team on 0300 303 8596 (option 1).

Yours sincerely



Gayle Dolan
Consultant in Public Health