

**To: Lancashire schools**

**6 January 2011**

**RE: Staying well during the flu season**

**Dear Colleague**

We are writing to update you on the local flu situation and to offer some advice on how staff and pupils can stay healthy and well. We are now well into the usual winter flu season and latest figures from the Health Protection Agency (HPA) indicate that while levels of seasonal flu are continuing to increase across the UK, these are no higher than in previous years.

The two main strains of flu circulating are H1N1 (swine flu) and Influenza B, with H1N1 being the predominant strain. Full details are available on the Health Protection Agency website at [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk).

As you will know, when children return for a new term we always see a rise in infectious illnesses. Here are three key messages that can help keep everyone healthy over winter:

### **1. Stay at home if you have flu symptoms**

Children and staff who have symptoms of flu-like illness should stay away from school or nursery and as far as possible not mix with others until they have recovered and are free of symptoms. This is to avoid spreading the infection as much as possible.

### **2. Catch It, Bin It, Kill It**

Respiratory and hand hygiene is a key way to stop viruses spreading:

- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a disposable tissue when possible;
- Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully;
- Washing your hands frequently with soap and water and drying thoroughly to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to your face or to other people;
- Cleaning hard surfaces (such as door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product.
- Making sure pupils follow this advice.

### **3. Get vaccinated**

People in at-risk groups are eligible to get a free flu jab at their GP practice. This includes children who have long-term conditions such as heart problems,

diabetes and asthma. School-age children who do not have an underlying health condition are not eligible for a seasonal flu vaccination.

This year, for the first time, all pregnant women are also being offered the seasonal flu vaccination. This is because it protects against the H1N1 virus (swine flu), and pregnant women who catch this strain are at an increased risk of severe disease and flu-related hospital admissions.

The vaccine to protect against H1N1 (swine flu) is created in the same way as vaccines for other strains of flu. The vaccine does not contain any live virus, so it cannot cause flu. Its inclusion in this year's seasonal flu jab poses no additional risk and it is included simply because it is one of the major flu strains circulating in Britain this winter.

Although there were reports of many people during last year's pandemic only experiencing mild disease we need to stress that flu can be an extremely serious illness for people in at risk groups, including pregnant women, the elderly and those with other underlying conditions such as heart problems, diabetes, lung, liver or renal diseases and those who have weakened immune systems.

Most people with flu can 'self care' by taking plenty of rest, drinking lots of fluids and taking over-the-counter pain relievers such as paracetamol. But anyone displaying severe symptoms, particularly those in at risk groups, should contact their GP or local out-of-hours service for medical advice. Information on health services in Lancashire are available at:

Central Lancashire: [www.centrallancashire.nhs.uk/choosewell](http://www.centrallancashire.nhs.uk/choosewell)

East Lancashire: [www.eastlancspct.nhs.uk](http://www.eastlancspct.nhs.uk)

North Lancashire: [www.northlancshealth.nhs.uk](http://www.northlancshealth.nhs.uk)

Many thanks for your time and hopefully with your support we can help keep staff, children and parents well over the coming winter months. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact your dedicated school nurse or visit [www.nhs.uk/flu](http://www.nhs.uk/flu).

Yours sincerely

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