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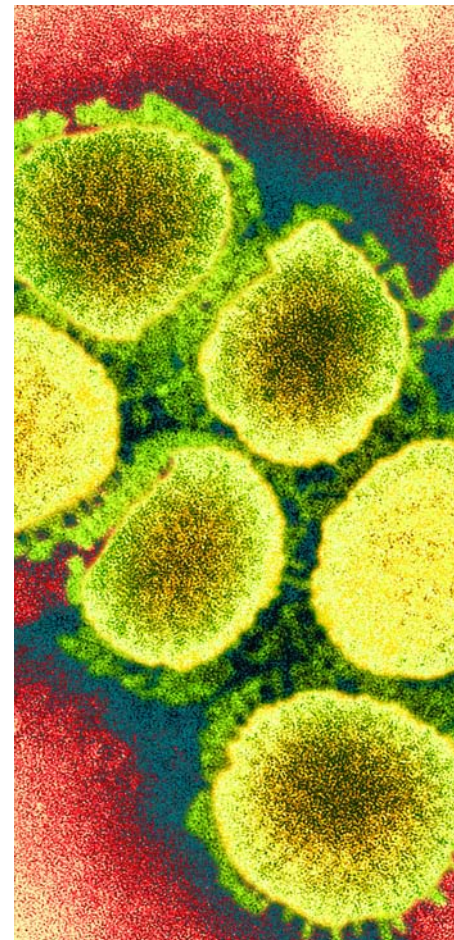
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Swine flu and schools

Advice for the public



Swine flu is a virus that is particularly affecting children and young adults. Children are proving to be highly efficient carriers of the swine flu (pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza) virus and schools provide the perfect environment for it to spread.

There are lots of children with flu-like symptoms in the school. Why is the school not being advised to close?

School closures and the distribution of antiviral medicines for prevention are not recommended at this time because the virus is widespread within the community. People are likely to be repeatedly exposed to the virus in their everyday lives, therefore closing a school will no longer be effective in slowing the spread of the virus, as people could still be exposed outside the school.

In some special circumstances, for example at a school with children who are particularly vulnerable to infection, then closure might still be recommended.

Isn't it better for my child to catch this now to develop some immunity, in case this comes back more seriously?

There is good evidence that in the majority of swine flu patients, the disease is generally mild, but it is also proving severe in a small minority of cases. It is preferable to avoid exposure to the virus if possible, which also helps to protect higher-risk groups from unnecessary risk. However, children should not be kept off school if they are well and their school is open.

What should I do if my child has symptoms of swine flu?

If you think your child may have swine flu, you should check their symptoms on www.nhs.uk or call the **National Pandemic Flu Service (NPFS)** on **0800 1513 513**. If you are still concerned, you should call your GP.

If your child has the signs and symptoms of swine flu, which include fever, fatigue, lack of appetite, coughing, sore throat, pain in muscles and joints, headache and chills and, in some cases, vomiting and diarrhoea, you should keep your child away from school until they have recovered and are free of symptoms.

If your child is prescribed antiviral medicines for treatment, they should also stay at home until they have finished the course. This is to avoid spreading the infection as much as possible.

What can schools and parents do to slow the spread?

By practising good hygiene everyone can play their part and help to reduce transmission of all viruses, including swine flu, by:

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

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