



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Headteachers of schools in Wales
Directors of Education
Proprietors of Independent Schools in Wales

14 July 2009

Dear Headteacher

Update on Swine Influenza H1N1 for Schools

I would like to update you on the latest developments concerning the Influenza A (H1N1v) Swine Flu pandemic and the implications for schools. You may be aware by now that the UK has moved from the containment phase (i.e. slowing the spread of swine flu through the preventative use of antiviral drugs and contact tracing) to the treatment phase.

In practical terms, this means an immediate end to contact tracing, prophylaxis and the laboratory confirmation of cases. School closures will no longer be an important element in the management of the local response, nor will prophylactic use of antivirals which characterised the "containment" phase. It is still recommended that children who are symptomatic are kept at home and if symptoms develop during the school day are sent home.

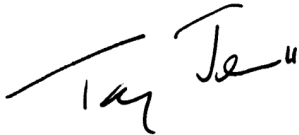
The attached letter from Dr Mike Simmons of the National Public Health Service for Wales and its appendices provides further detailed information on the treatment phase and its implications for schools. The NPHS will still be a source of public health advice for headteachers and schools and the contact details are provided.

You will be able to keep up to date with developments during the summer holiday period by visiting the Swine Flu section of the Welsh Assembly Government internet site at www.wales.gov.uk. Advice specifically for the education sector can be found by clicking the advice link and then choosing education.



From September we will be seeking your assistance in monitoring the spread and impact of the Swine Flu virus. To that end we will be asking you to report to your local authority any affects of swine flu on usual service delivery, for example a sudden drop in pupil attendance. We will be in touch with more detailed instructions in the first week of the autumn term.

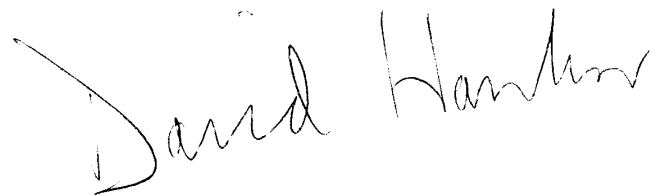
Yours faithfully



Dr Tony Jewell

Chief Medical Officer [Prif Swyddog Meddygol](#)
[Director, Department for Public Health and Health Professions](#)

Cyfarwyddwr, Adran Iechyd y Cyhoedd a'r Proffesiynau Iechyd



Professor David Hawker

[Director, Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills](#)

Cyfarwyddwr, Yr Adran Plant, Addysg, Dysgu Gydol Oes a Sgiliau

Information for schools from the National Public Health Service for Wales

Swine flu is now circulating in many parts of the UK, and more cases are expected in the next few months, with widespread activity in Wales by the time schools return from the summer vacation.

There are a few simple measures you can use to reduce the spread of flu in your school. Everyone can play their part by practicing good hygiene:

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

If people think they may have flu and want to check their symptoms they can call the Swine Flu Information Line on 0800 1 513 513. If they are still concerned they should contact NHS Direct Wales on 0845 4647.

Staff or students with flu like illness should stay at home until they are well and have finished any treatment their doctor has prescribed. Where people become ill during the day they should be sent home. Siblings and other household members can continue to attend school while they remain well.

With swine flu circulating within the country, closing a school would not help to slow the spread of the virus as people could still be exposed outside the school. However, where there is high staff absenteeism it may be necessary to close the school or after-school club until there is sufficient staff to safely care for the children.

It is important that any woman who is pregnant and has flu-like symptoms (headache, cough, sore throat and fever) should call NHS Wales Direct on 0845 4647 or call their GP as soon as possible. Pregnant women who are diagnosed with any type of flu may require close monitoring as they are one of the groups who have a higher risk of developing complications. Infection with the flu virus during pregnancy has not been associated with an increased risk to the unborn baby.

Other groups who are at higher risk of complications include:

- people with chronic lung disease including people who have had drug treatment for their asthma within the past three years
- people with chronic heart disease
- people with chronic kidney disease
- people with chronic liver disease
- people with chronic neurological disease
- people with suppressed immune systems (whether caused by disease or treatment)
- people with diabetes
- pregnant women
- people aged 65 years and older
- children under five years old.

People in these high risk groups should seek medical advice as soon as possible if they become ill with a flu-like illness.

Attached is a letter that you could send out to parents in advance of the school holidays (Appendix A).

The National Public Health Service for Wales (NPHS) has also been asked about the risks to pregnant staff or those staff in “at risk” groups from children who may attend school with flu. At Appendix B is a copy of a risk assessment exercise conducted by the Health Protection Agency, which we would commend to you. The opinion, which we endorse, is that for pregnant staff or staff with other “at risk” conditions, there is no overall excess risk associated with schools compared to the communities in which they live. Clearly, under health and safety legislation, it is for the employer to satisfy themselves that they are managing any risks in the workplace and own their risk assessments.

Your local authority will wish to be advised if the school is being affected by swine flu and the NPHS Health Protection Team would be pleased to assist in outbreak management where this would be helpful or for general advice.

Your regional NPHS Health Protection Team can be contacted on:

- For **Anglesey, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd** and **Wrexham** call 01352 803234
- For **Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire** and **Powys** call 01267 225081
- For **Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot** and **Swansea** call 01792 607387
- For **Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport** and **Torfaen** call 01495 332219
- **Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf**, and **Vale of Glamorgan** call 02920 402478

Appendix A

Draft letter for headteachers to send to parents on own letterhead

Dear Parent,

By the time we return from the summer holiday break, all the evidence suggests that flu will be circulating in our communities and we will expect to see cases in the school.

Please remember that if your child is ill with flu like symptoms you must keep them at home until they are fully recovered. Siblings and other household members who are well can continue to come to school. With swine flu circulating within the community, public health advice states that closing the school will not help to slow the spread of the virus as people could still be exposed outside the school.

Equally, over the summer, many children will enjoy various activities and holiday clubs. As is usual practice, if they become ill, they should not attend until they are fully recovered.

Symptoms of flu include a fever, cough, sore throat, aching muscles, sneezing, fatigue, runny nose and lack of appetite. Some people with swine flu have also reported vomiting and diarrhoea.

For most children swine flu is a mild illness. However, if you think you or your child may have flu and want to check the symptoms call the Swine Flu Information Line on 0800 1 513 513. If you are still concerned contact NHS Direct Wales on 0845 4647.

Everyone can play their part in reducing the spread of flu by practicing good hygiene:

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

HPA Risk Assessment on Pregnant Teachers

As noted in the text of the letter to headteachers, any risk assessment needs to be locally owned by the employer under the guidance of health and safety legislation. The NPHS commends this assessment for consideration by education authorities and headteachers.

The assessment is taken from an extract from the text of a response regarding the risk assessment for pregnant teachers in Birmingham (an area of sustained community transmission).

'... it is important not to consider pregnant women as a group apart and many of the issues relating to them will apply to those in the other at risk groups therefore the advice to those in the other "at risk" groups would also apply to pregnant women . The key to managing this group would be in ensuring that those in the at risks groups, including pregnant women are aware of the signs and symptoms of influenza so that they can seek early medical advice or assessment and, if indicated, treatment.

Once influenza is ubiquitous in the community pregnant women are just as likely to be exposed in the community as their workplace. It would be sensible for pregnant women to avoid contact with people exhibiting symptoms consistent with a flu like illness in any setting.

In the context of pregnant teachers -

The emphasis should be on ensuring that symptomatic children are identified, isolated and sent home. Good personal hygiene should be applied whenever possible.

The test that we would normally apply in a risk assessment in the workplace is whether, or not, there is an excess risk as compared to the normative probability for the population concerned.

In respect to a pregnant women in an occupational setting the questions that we believe are generally pertinent are:

(1) is the hazard a significant risk to either maternal or foetal health?

(2) is she being exposed to a population amongst which there is an unusually high prevalence of the hazard under consideration?

(3) is she being placed in a situation (environment / procedures / processes) where there are modes of transmission / exposure to that hazard give rise to an excess risk of acquisition of disease?

(4) are there any unusual features of the workplace that give rise to disease being more severe if acquired?

(5) does the form or type of workplace restrict her ability to seek help and intervention if disease is suspected?

In respect to teaching it is our opinion that the answers to these questions are:

(1) Equivocal. Evidence suggests increased risk of developing maternal influenza associated pneumonia and cardio-respiratory complications. Data on association of maternal influenza being associated with increased risk of some congenital abnormalities is inconsistent. There is a suggestion that fever in pregnancy is associated with a variety of foetal conditions - see the HPA prescribing guidance.

(2) No. Disease is as prevalent in the community as in the classroom; indeed if sick children are excluded from schools (as they ordinarily should be) then it may be expected that exposure to viraemic excretors is lower in the classroom than in everyday life.

(3) No. There is no requirement for teachers to be involved in examination of airways / undertaking invasive procedures on ill children that generate aerosols giving rise to transmission.

(4) No. There is not evidence that pregnant women are at increased risk of acquiring disease

(5) No.

We would summarise this as saying that for pregnant women and other people in the at risk groups that there is not overall excess risk associated with teaching compared to the risks that they face in everyday life in the community within which they live.