

November 2015

Flu advice for parents/guardians/carers with children at school

What is flu?

Flu is a respiratory illness caused by several strains of Influenza virus. These strains include strains of flu A and strains of flu B.

Flu Vaccination:

The annual flu vaccine programme includes all children aged 2 years to Primary 7 inclusive (as in last year).

This year's seasonal flu vaccination is effective against the two most common strains of flu A and two flu B strains that are predicted to circulate in the community this year. Most children, who are eligible for the vaccine aged 2 years to 16 years inclusive, will be offered a vaccine that is given as a spray into the nose instead of an injection.

Children in P1 to P7 will be offered the flu vaccine by school health teams and we would encourage all parents to protect their children from the unpleasant and potentially serious effects of flu by accepting the offer of the vaccine. More information can be found at: <http://fluawareni.info/vaccination>

Seasonal flu vaccination is also advised for all adults and children over 6 months with the following conditions:

- a chronic chest condition such as asthma;
- a chronic heart condition;
- chronic liver disease;
- chronic kidney disease;
- diabetes;
- lowered immunity due to disease or treatment such as steroids or cancer therapy (people living in the same house as someone with lowered immunity may also need to be vaccinated);

- a chronic neurological condition such as stroke, multiple sclerosis or a condition that affects your nervous system, such as cerebral palsy.

Pregnant women regardless of their stage of pregnancy, anyone aged 65 or over, anyone living in a residential or nursing home and main carers for an elderly or disabled person should also be vaccinated.

What are the symptoms of flu?

The symptoms of flu often start suddenly and include:

- fever
- fatigue
- pains in the limbs or the joints
- coughing
- sore throat
- headache
- runny nose
- some people also have vomiting and diarrhoea.

How is Flu treated?

Most people, including children, will recover within a few days. Resting and taking over the counter preparations such as Paracetamol will help. Anyone with flu-like symptoms should stay at home, so as not to infect others, until feeling better.

Those with underlying conditions, or if feeling short of breath or very unwell should telephone their GP or GP out of hours service for advice. For these people, antiviral medication may be advised. The Public Health Agency (PHA) advises it is important that patients with flu-like symptoms do not attend an accident and emergency department unless absolutely necessary and urgent.

Schools have been advised by the PHA, should a child develop flu-like symptoms at school, arrangements should be made for them to be taken home as soon as possible. While waiting, they should be placed in a suitable area, such as a medical room or a small office (to reduce the chance of spreading infection to other children), but where they can be kept under observation.

Parents should take their child straight home and if necessary telephone their GP or GP out-of-hours service.

If a child develops flu-like symptoms at home, they should be kept away from school until they recover and parents should, if necessary, seek medical advice.

Effective Hygiene advice

Parents and schools can help reduce the spread of all viruses by encouraging children to practise good personal hygiene by:

- Washing their hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of virus from their hands to their face or to others;
- Covering their nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing and to use a tissue when possible;
- Disposing of used tissues quickly and carefully.

Schools have been advised by the Education Authority and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools to ensure that adequate supplies of liquid soap, hot and cold water and paper towels or hot air dryers are available for pupils and staff. It is not necessary for schools to provide hand sanitisers, however, should they wish to do so, it is important to note that they are not a substitute for good hand washing facilities. Hard surfaces (eg door handles) should be frequently cleaned using a normal cleaning product.