

**For information – Swine Flu communication from Scottish Government Schools
Directorate to Directors of Education/Children's Services
Scottish Council for Independent schools**

Those of you most directly affected by the outbreak of swine flu since my previous update on 12 June will have seen a significant change in the NHS policy, approach and recommendations re the handling of cases within schools and nurseries. Since the new cases have essentially all been within existing clusters, the policy has switched from partial (classes or year groups) or complete closures of schools - and quite widespread issue of Tamiflu - to much more limited exclusions from school just of the cases themselves and close contacts - and limiting the issue of Tamiflu to that relatively small group of pupils. The rationale for the change in policy was set out and explained in the attachments to my previous update (Ms Sturgeon's Parliamentary statement of 11 June and Kevin Woods' letter of the following day).

The situation at present is that Scotland has almost 700 confirmed cases of swine flu, nearly a quarter of the UK total of 2,900. It is still not yet clear whether the progress of the outbreak will slow over the summer or not, but we need to be preparing now for the real possibility of a very significant increase in intensity and disruption during the autumn. Schools and nurseries will be particularly at risk because children and young people are approximately 4 times as likely as the general population to catch swine flu, and when they have it, are around one and a half times more infectious than adults ie more likely to pass it on. Preparedness is everything.

Ministerial letter to parents/carers

The Cabinet Secretaries for Health and Wellbeing and for Education and Lifelong Learning - Nicola Sturgeon and Fiona Hyslop - signed (together with the Leader of the relevant Council) and sent a letter last Friday to the parents and carers of children and pupils of all nurseries and schools which have been affected by partial or full closures in recent weeks. The purpose of the letter was essentially twofold - to thank them for their co-operation and understanding over actions taken to try to contain and slow the spread of the virus and to provide some information about the summer holiday period and beyond.

I attach a copy of the letter - minus the local authority signatory (which was added locally) - albeit not for onward transmission since the introduction makes the letter only appropriate for the specific circumstances for which it was drafted ie schools which have been partially or fully closed. Ministers wish though to ensure that the main messages contained in their letter are also available to all parents. I therefore also attach a summary set of Q&A which we are placing on *Parentzone* and which I would encourage you to consider placing on the 'flu section' of your own Council's website.

[See Appendix for Cabinet Secretary's letter and Parentzone Q & A](#)

The school holidays

The focus of attention changes significantly with the onset of the school summer holidays. In the context of Council responsibilities for a wide range of leisure and recreation services - such as summer camps and a whole range of indoor and outdoor leisure etc activities - some

of which are entirely seasonal and many of which are used more intensively by children and young people during the summer holidays, I would urge you to be as vigilant in relation to swine flu during the summer holidays as you have been during term time. It is particularly important meantime to ensure that the same close level of liaison and communication with public health authorities and health protection teams is maintained over the summer. I would ask those of you who are not also responsible for leisure and recreation services, please to share this e-mail with your appropriate colleague.

Learning lessons ready for the new term

As long ago as 20th May I shared with you some early thoughts which had been largely pulled together with the help of colleagues in Inverclyde, in light of experiences of the first school and nursery closures in Greenock at the very beginning of this outbreak. There is now a great deal more experience of handling and managing swine flu as it impacts on schools and nurseries, particularly from the clusters of cases in and around Dunoon, Paisley and greater Glasgow. I am in the process of setting up meetings with colleagues in these local authority areas with a view to collating the experiences and lessons learned and sharing them with you in a way which I would hope might be helpful, before the start of the new term in mid-August. A lot of course will depend on the situation then and whether or not we may be facing the prospect of school and nursery closures from day one of the new term. It is not possible to see that far ahead at this stage.

It is also my intention to have discussions with COSLA and ADES around these and other issues where it is sensible at this stage to be planning and looking ahead at some of the wider issues that may be coming over the horizon. I shall also be hoping to meet with the relevant unions, to gain a better understanding of the experiences of their members to date and also to discuss some of the wider issues.

It is our intention to craft a letter for issue to all Parent Councils, parents and schools at the beginning of the new term in mid-August, updating and informing them about the situation as it will be then and advising them further as to what will or may happen in the coming weeks and months and how matters will be handled. It seemed preferable to issue that letter to all parents at the start of the new term - when forward projections will be clearer (based on another 8 weeks of experience) - rather than at the end of this term.

Vaccination programme

One of the issues which that mid-August letter will need to address is the latest information regarding the development of a vaccine against swine flu and the Scottish Government's intention, like the UK Government, to run a vaccination programme for the whole population. Experts are already looking to identify which groups in the population would be vaccinated in what order of priority. Children and young people would be likely to be near the top of the list. The timing of any vaccination programme, part of which could be schools-based, will depend on how quickly it can be manufactured, distributed and administered. It is likely to start sometime in the autumn although unlikely to commence within the first few weeks of term. We will be sure to keep you, schools and parents/carers informed of developments.

Finally, colleagues here in Children, Young People and Social Care Directorate have asked me to indicate that they will also be writing shortly to Directors of Children's Services and of

Social Work suggesting issues and approaches that they might find helpful to consider, and offering help.

Can I conclude by expressing my profound thanks to those of you who, with your teams and staff - both in headquarters and out in schools, have been in the thick of the recent action to handle and manage the impact of the pandemic so far on schools and nurseries: and to everyone else for maintaining appropriate levels of vigilance and readiness. I wish you all a thoroughly well-deserved break at whatever point over the summer holidays you take it.

Colin.

COLIN REEVES - Schools Directorate,
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Appendix 1: Cabinet Secretary's letter

Deputy First Minister & Cabinet Secretary for
Health and Wellbeing
Nicola Sturgeon MSP

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning
Fiona Hyslop MSP

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19 June 2009

Dear parent or carer

SWINE FLU

We are writing to you at the end of a difficult term to thank you for all your co-operation and support over the swine flu situation. Some of you will have had a child who has fallen ill with the flu and then recovered - fortunately the disease among young people has been generally mild in most cases. Others of you will have been directly affected by the closure of all or part of a school or nursery and/or the offer of a course of the Tamiflu anti-viral drugs to help protect your child or children.

You will probably be aware that the World Health Organisation has now declared a global flu pandemic – Phase or level 6. This does not indicate any increase in the severity of the virus, rather it is an indication of how it is spreading globally.

Our efforts to contain and slow down the spread of the virus in Scotland have so far only involved closure of directly affected schools. Decisions on school and nursery closures have been taken on a case by case basis by local authorities, after full discussion and advice from local health boards and health protection teams. The same approach has been taken regarding decisions to re-open, usually after 7 days.

Meantime, we would want to re-emphasise the importance – in the home just as at school or nursery – of the health and hygiene advice in the leaflet that you will have received through your letterbox last month. Hand-washing and proper use of tissues is especially important for children and young people because they are more likely than others to catch this strain of flu and indeed to pass it on.

A vaccine is being developed against swine flu and the Scottish Government, like the UK Government, intends to run a vaccination programme for the whole population. Expert advice is being taken to identify which groups in the population will be vaccinated in order of priority. The timing of the vaccination programme will depend on how quickly the vaccine can be manufactured and distributed. We will keep you updated about this during the autumn.

Some of your children will be attending camps, play schemes or other organised events and activities over the holidays. We would not advise you to change any of these plans, although you may obviously wish to check in advance with the organisers. The public health authorities and health protection teams will be keeping a very close watch on the flu situation over the summer. They will be liaising as closely with the organisers of summer activities and events as they have been with nurseries and schools during term time.

If you have foreign holidays planned over the summer and are concerned about whether or not it is advisable to travel, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's website contains the most up to date and detailed advice about travelling overseas - www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/swine-flu

If at any time over the summer anyone in your household develops a flu-like illness and you are concerned over their symptoms, the advice is to stay at home and seek medical advice by either contacting your GP, or NHS 24 on 08454 242424. As the start of the new term approaches in mid August, it will be helpful if you make contact in advance with the school or nursery if anyone within your household is ill at that time with flu or flu-like symptoms.

The *Parentzone* website – www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentzone - will continue to be updated over the summer holidays with appropriate information and advice, as will Councils' own websites on the situation locally.

Our main priority and efforts continue to focus on how best we can protect the health and wellbeing of all our children and young people – and we very much appreciate your understanding and assistance.



Nicola Sturgeon MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Health & Wellbeing



Fiona Hyslop MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Education & Lifelong Learning

Appendix 2:

SWINE FLU – Q&A for *Parentzone* – 24 June 2009

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q What can I do to help?

Help your childminder, nursery, pre-school group, school or out-of-school club by making sure that they have your up-to-date contact details – your address, phone number (home, work and mobile) and e-mail details as appropriate. They will need to get in touch if there is a case of swine flu confirmed among the children or staff and they suspect that children may be at risk.

Q What should I do if my child (or indeed anyone else in the household) shows any signs of flu-like illness?

If your child is unwell and you are concerned about their health you should contact your local GP or NHS24 (0845 242424) for advice.

You should keep them at home and not send them to school, nursery, childcare organisation or summer activity. You should also inform the school, nursery, childcare organisation or summer activity organiser.

Q Is hand-washing and the use of tissues important?

Yes, very, and as much in the home as in the school or nursery. The advice in the leaflet you received through your letterbox recently should be followed. Frequent hand-washing and use of tissues to cover coughs and sneezes is very important in helping to slow the spread of swine flu among children and young people because they are so much more likely than others to catch and spread it.

CLOSURES & ATTENDANCE

Q Why have schools and nurseries been closing?

To try to contain and slow down the spread of swine flu. Children and young people are 4 times as likely as the general population to catch swine flu, and when they have it they are more likely to pass it on.

Q What happens if a pupil or staff member at the school or nursery is suspected of having, or has swine flu?

If this happens, the education and health authorities will liaise very closely and decide what is the appropriate action to take. This may or may not involve temporary closure of part or all of the school or nursery.

Letters from the local NHS will explain to parents and pupils what is happening, whether or not Tamiflu anti-viral treatment is being offered, and why.

Where the flu is already spreading in the local community the authorities may decide against closing the school or nursery.

Q What are my rights as a parent to keep my child off school or nursery if I am concerned?

If your child is at school and the school remains open, your normal responsibility to send your child to school still applies.

Contact the school though and discuss your concerns with them.

Q Are alternative arrangements being made for childcare if schools or nurseries are closed?

No, because the main reason for closures is to reduce the spread of infection by closing places where children come together in groups.

SUMMER CAMPS, ACTIVITIES, EVENTS ETC

Q What about camps, play schemes and other organised events and activities over the summer holidays that my child will be attending?

Do not change any plans you already have, although you may wish to check in advance with the organisers. The health authorities will be keeping a very close watch on the flu situation over the summer and will be liaising closely with the organisers of summer activities and events.

A SWINE FLU VACCINE

Q I have heard about a vaccine against swine flu? Will my child receive it and when?

A vaccine is being developed against swine flu and the Government intends to run a vaccination programme for the whole population. The timing will depend on how quickly the vaccine can be manufactured and distributed. It is not yet possible to say when it will begin or which groups of people will be vaccinated first. Further information will be available in the autumn.

FOREIGN TRAVEL

Q I have a foreign holiday planned over the summer – is it safe to travel?

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's website has the most up to date and detailed advice about travelling overseas – www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/swine-flu

