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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.

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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.



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