

To Directors of Education

The Health Protection Team would be very grateful if you could ensure that headteachers in your area are sent this respiratory illness advice letter for schools and nurseries.

Date 4 December 2019
Our Ref HPT/LM
Enquiries to Health Protection
Extension 35420 / 35422
Direct Line 0131 465 5420 / 5422
Email: Health.Protection@nhsllothian.scot.nhs.uk

Dear Headteacher

Winter 2019/20 Respiratory Illness

You will probably be aware that we have seen a large number of respiratory outbreaks in nurseries and schools in the past few weeks. These have caused service disruption with staff shortages and many pupils being absent from school/nursery.

The main symptoms being reported include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Muscle aches
- Sore tummy
- Cold/Flu like symptoms
- headache

These symptoms are consistent with respiratory viral illnesses such as the common cold, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and influenza.

Respiratory viruses are spread by breathing in droplets produced when a person coughs or sneezes. You can also catch the virus by touching the surfaces that the droplets have landed on if you pick up the virus on your hands and then touch your nose or mouth.

We would like to ask your help in disseminating the information on your school's website or newsletters about how parents can try to stop these respiratory viruses spreading at home (see text box). We would also like to draw your attention to the advice contained overleaf on outbreak management within schools.

Key advice for parents and carers

In the home the risk of catching or spreading flu/cold like illness can be reduced by:

- Regular hand washing with liquid soap and running water
- Covering nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing
- Using a disposable paper tissue, disposed off immediately after use.
- You can teach your child to sneeze into the 'crook' of their arm rather than their hands, if they don't have a tissue. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQINuSTP1jI>
- Good general cleaning of surface that everyone touches often e.g. TV remote, light switches, door handles, toilet flushes and tap heads.
- <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/common-cold>
- <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/flu>

Children should not return to school until completely well and 48 hours after symptoms have

Headquarters
Waverley Gate
2-4 Waterloo Place
Edinburgh EH1 3EG

Chair Brian G. Houston
Chief Executive Tim Davison

Lothian NHS Board is the common name of Lothian Health Board

Vital infection prevention and control measures for the initial management of a respiratory outbreak are very similar to that of norovirus and include:

1. **Thorough hand washing is the simplest and most important infection control measure.** Please advise that all children and staff wash their hands frequently using warm running water and liquid soap, especially after using the toilet and before eating and preparing food. Liquid soap via a soap dispenser should be made available and there should be a plentiful supply of paper towels. Younger nursery pupils may require hand over hand assistance with hand washing.
2. **Prompt exclusion:** Provide an isolation room with appropriate supervision for pupils who become unwell during the day. Ensure this room is cleaned regularly. Inform parent/guardian to collect ASAP.
3. **Remind parents to keep their children at home until 48hrs after symptoms cease.**
4. **Staff and pupil movements** between classrooms and joint class activities in school, e.g. assembly should be restricted.
5. **Cancellation of trips or events:** The health protection team may advise the cancellation of any trips outwith the school, and to keep the number of visitors to the school to a minimum. Unfortunately in the past this has meant cancelling major school events, particularly during the build up to Christmas.
6. **Environmental & Equipment cleaning:** Regular cleaning of frequently touched surfaces and communal toys.
7. **Personal protective equipment:** Disposable aprons and gloves should be worn when cleaning the environment, cleaning and disinfecting potties, changing nappies, toileting a child or cleaning up vomit or diarrhoea. Staff should wash their hands after the removal of gloves and aprons. After School Clubs who use the school premises should be made aware of the situation, as it may be necessary to stop children from other schools attending the ASC, to prevent onward transmission of the virus.

If you identify a suspected outbreak of respiratory illness in your nursery or school, it is important that you notify NHS Lothian's Health Protection Team (**Tel: 0131 465 5420 / 5422** within normal working hours. Advice and support will be provided in order to try and control the outbreak

Please have the above contact number clearly displayed/available for key staff to access.

The Health Protection Team will advise on any further measures that may need to be taken. The decision to close premises will be taken in discussion with the Local Authority Environmental Health Officer, the Head teacher and the health protection team. However, this is only necessary in rare circumstances.

If you require any further information, please contact the NHS Lothian Health Protection Team.

Yours sincerely



Lindsey Murphy
Advanced Health Protection Nurse Manager

Useful guidance documents:

Information on the best way to wash hands and on getting children's handwashing packs is available on the website: <http://www.washyourhandsofthem.com/home.aspx>

Infection Prevention and Control in Childcare Settings (Day Care and Childminding Settings)
<http://www.playscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/infection-prevention-control-childcare.pdf>

Information on Influenza and the common cold for parents/carers can be found on NHS Inform here:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/flu>

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/common-cold>