
What are the symptoms of swine flu?

The symptoms of swine flu are similar to those of normal flu and typically include fever (temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or higher) and two or more of the following: cough, sore throat, runny nose, limb or joint pain, and headache. In some people swine flu can also cause vomiting and diarrhoea.

In most cases so far, swine flu has caused a generally mild illness. However swine flu can cause more severe illness and certain people will be at higher risk of becoming seriously ill. These 'high risk' groups include:

- Children under 5 years old
- Children and adults with the following medical conditions: chronic lung disease, chronic heart disease, chronic kidney disease, chronic liver disease, chronic neurological disease, diabetes mellitus, and immunosuppression e.g. those being treated for leukaemia or other cancers.
- Children and adults who have had drug treatment for asthma within the past three years
- Pregnant women
- People aged 65 years and older.

How is swine flu spread?

Swine flu is usually spread directly from person to person through someone with the infection coughing or sneezing. Some people may become infected by touching something with the swine flu virus on it (e.g. a surface someone with swine flu has coughed or sneezed on) and then touching their mouth or nose.

What can be done to prevent the spread of swine flu?

At the current stage in the pandemic it is considered impossible to avoid swine flu completely. Therefore there is no public health need to exclude anyone who is well from their usual school or nursery routine in the hope of avoiding exposure.

The following steps can be taken to help prevent the spread of swine flu within schools and nurseries:

- Tell sick staff and children to stay at home

Parents should be told not to send children with flu-like illness to the school or nursery, and that they should stay away until their symptoms have passed and they feel well enough to return.

Staff should not go to work if they have flu-like illness and should not go back to work until their symptoms have passed and they feel well enough to return.

- Promote good respiratory and hand hygiene

Children and staff should be taught and encouraged to cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, to put the tissue in the bin, and to then wash their hands.

Children and staff should be reminded to practice good hand hygiene - washing their hands regularly and thoroughly i.e. for at least 15 seconds using soap and running water. In particular, children should be taught to wash their hands when they are dirty, after blowing their nose, coughing or sneezing, after using the toilet, and before eating.

Hand hygiene advice, including guidance on how to wash hands properly has been developed by the National Hand Hygiene Campaign and can be found at: <http://www.washyourhandsofthem.com/handwashing/howtowash.html>

Educational materials to help teach young children when and how to wash their hands have been distributed to all nursery and primary schools and can be found at: <http://www.washyourhandsofthem.com/campaign/childrenspack.html>

Schools and nurseries should ensure that children and staff are provided with easy access to tissues, bins and hand washing facilities. Ensure hand washing facilities are stocked with soap and paper towels.

- Keep the environment clean

Use normal cleaning products to clean any frequently touched surfaces (such as desks, door handles and light switches) and commonly shared items. This should be done at least daily.

What action should be taken if a child becomes unwell whilst at the school or nursery?

All staff should be made aware of the symptoms of swine flu and the following action should be taken if a child becomes unwell:

- Move the sick child to a separate room

The child with flu-like symptoms should be moved to a separate room away from other children until a parent or carer can come to collect him / her.

The number of staff caring for the child should be kept to a minimum and these staff should ensure that they practice good respiratory and hand hygiene at all times.

- Advise the parent or carer to seek medical advice for the child.

Parents and carers should be advised to contact their GP or NHS24 for medical advice as soon as possible. This is particularly important if the child is considered to be at high risk of developing more severe illness (see page 1 for definition of 'high risk' groups).

- Advise the parent or carer that the child can return to school or nursery once their symptoms have passed and they are feeling well.
- Clean any visibly dirty or frequently touched surfaces using normal cleaning products.

What action should be taken if a staff member becomes unwell whilst at the school or nursery?

If a staff member becomes unwell with flu-like symptoms they should be told to go home and to contact their GP or NHS24 for medical advice. This is particularly important if the staff member is considered to be at high risk of developing more severe illness (see page 1 for definition of 'high risk' groups).

Is there any particular advice for special schools?

- The advice for preventing and controlling the spread of swine flu in special schools is the same as that for mainstream schools as detailed above. However, children attending special schools may be at greater risk of developing severe infections due to underlying medical conditions. Schools may therefore wish to contact their local NHS board Health Protection Team for specific advice if a pupil or staff member displays flu-like symptoms whilst at school.

Is there any particular advice for boarding schools?

Swine flu may spread easily in a school or nursery and the chance of catching it in a boarding school, where pupils are living closely together, is only slightly higher than in day schools.

Boarding pupils who develop flu-like illness should, if possible, return home until their symptoms have passed and they feel well enough to return. Ill children should be collected by family or friends and not return home on public transport.

If unable to return home, the educational institution should:

- Identify appropriate accommodation for caring for a pupil with swine flu. This should be a single room, ideally en-suite. If there are a number of ill children then it may be easier to place all ill children together in a designated area. In this situation, keep beds well spaced out.
- Ensure unwell pupils do not take part in any communal activities for the duration of their isolation (that is, until their symptoms have passed).
- Keep visitors to the pupil(s) to a minimum.

- Identify which member(s) of staff will care for the pupil(s) with flu. The number of staff who have close contact with the pupil(s) during their illness should be kept to a minimum. Staff at high risk of developing more severe illness should not care for symptomatic pupils (see page 1 for definition of 'high risk' groups).
- Discuss the need for personal protective equipment (e.g. aprons, gloves or masks) and environmental cleaning with the local NHS board Health Protection Team.

Further advice should be sought from the local NHS board Health Protection Team.