

Date **12th November 2009**
Our Ref **DB/KW**
Enquiries to: **Dr David Breen**
Extension **32724**
Direct Line **01387 272724**

Dear Parent / Guardian of pupils at all Schools in Dumfries & Galloway

Clinically diagnosed cases of Swineflu (H1N1) flu

Swineflu is now well established in large tracts of Dumfries & Galloway. While as recently as a week ago, we could only demonstrate spread in the Stewartry, it is clear that Stranraer and parts of Wigtownshire are now widely affected as well as hotspots in Annandale & Eskdale e.g. Moffat. In effect, if you or your child has flu-like symptoms in Dumfries & Galloway, it is highly likely at this stage that it is H1 N1 swineflu. Clinical or self-diagnosis is adequate at this stage and laboratory testing (throat/nose swabs) will only be done for hospitalised cases and by Public Health as we track the spread of the infection locally.

Absenteeism is running high in at least 15 schools but all of these schools are coping as best they can to continue with their educational remit. Anecdotally, many of those absent are reporting swineflu symptoms. The school outbreak is an extension of circulating swineflu in the Dumfries & Galloway communities. We expect several more schools to succumb over the next few weeks.

I understand that this situation must be of some concern for you and indeed the risk to your child of developing swineflu both at school and at home in our present situation is considerable. The course of the illness in otherwise healthy children is usually mild and doesn't require hospital intervention. Children with clinical at-risk conditions should already be or getting immunised with H1 N1 vaccine. It is reassuring that no schoolchildren have been hospitalised in Dumfries & Galloway in the past few weeks despite the number of cases reported running into hundreds.

What we are now trying to do is to protect the vulnerable children and adults in our communities from complications of swineflu, i.e pneumonias, and to prevent any deaths in those children or adults with clinically at-risk medical conditions. We can no longer control the spread of swineflu across Scotland and the UK.

The main message is: if your child is unwell with flu-like symptoms, please keep them at home until they are completely recovered. A leaflet is enclosed which gives information on the flu virus as well as some advice on good hygiene measures and symptoms to look out for.

If your child develops any of the symptoms described in the leaflet in the next 7 days please keep them at home and treat them symptomatically with plenty of fluids and with paracetamol if they have a high temperature. We are encouraging parents to self-care for their children at home with flu-like symptoms now. Most parents have been doing that anyway and we appreciate their common sense approach to this. We see little need for anti-viral drugs, e.g. tamiflu, in otherwise healthy children because the benefits are small and side-effects (vomiting and diarrhoea) are common (occurring in 25-50% of children). Of course, if you are worried or if your child appears more ill than you would expect, phone your GP Practice (8am-6pm Monday to Friday) or NHS 24 if outwith this period (08454 242424) for further advice and management. GP Practices will be concentrating on managing complications of swineflu, a job they do very well.

If you have any major concerns please contact the Health Protection Team on 01387 272724 or email me at david.breen@nhs.net.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "David Breen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

Dr David Breen
Consultant in Public Health Medicine