

July 2009

Dear Parents/Guardians

At Merchant Taylors' Schools we will always endeavour to implement the highest standards in terms of Health and Safety for all pupils and employees. In view of recent information and advice from the World Health Organisation, The Health Protection Agency and the Department of Health, and following the raising of the World Health Organisation pandemic alert level to phase 6, we would like to inform you that Merchant Taylors' Schools have a 'Pandemic Flu Management Team' and have also developed a 'Pandemic Flu School Policy' for our pupils and staff. These policies are available on request from the School Nurse.

School closure is only as a last resort, and only after direction from the local Health Authorities.

Swine flu is a contagious respiratory disease, caused by type A influenza viruses (H1N1) and has some elements of a virus found in pigs. However there is no evidence of this disease circulating in pigs in the UK. Swine flu has been confirmed in a number of countries and it is spreading from human to human. This has led to what is referred to as a 'pandemic flu outbreak'.

Pandemic flu is different from ordinary flu because it is a completely new type of flu virus and no one will have immunity to it. Therefore everyone is at risk of catching it, causing a serious risk to the health of our population.

The flu virus is spread by aerosol (small droplet) transmission. The organisms can be spread from the infected person via droplets in the air caused by coughing, sneezing (without covering your nose and mouth with a tissue) or close conversation and then inhaled by another person, thus infecting them. Germs from sneezing or coughing onto your hand can easily be spread from your hand to any surface that you touch and these germs can survive for some time. Door handles, computer keyboards, phones, light switches are all common surfaces where flu viruses can be found and be spread to others. For most people influenza infection is just a nasty experience, but for some it can lead to more serious illnesses. At the moment the disease is proving severe in a small minority of UK cases, for the majority it has been generally mild. The most common complications are bronchitis and secondary bacterial pneumonia which may become life threatening.

As part of our Pandemic Flu School Policy, all staff and pupils should not come into school if they suspect they are ill with the following symptoms, and it is vital that staff or parents contact the School immediately. This also applies if they have been abroad for their holidays and have come home feeling poorly. We would ask parents travelling to the USA, Mexico and Australia this summer to be especially vigilant on their return to the UK.

Signs and Symptoms of Swine Flu

- Abrupt onset of a high fever, dry cough or shortness of breath
- Headache, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, aching muscles and joints, extreme tiredness, a shivering feeling, chills, sneezing, loss of appetite or diarrhoea or stomach upset.
- Adults can be ill for a day before symptoms begin, but young children can be infectious for several days prior to showing symptoms.
- You will be infectious for around 7 days after symptoms first appear
- The flu could make you feel ill and have a temperature for up to a week, but you could feel weak and 'washed out' for several weeks longer

We have a Medical Room within each of our Schools so please be reassured that if any pupil showing signs of infection whilst at school will be effectively cared for in 'isolation' until a parent or guardian can collect them.

To help protect yourself and your children is to follow good hygiene practices. These will help to slow the spread of the virus and will be the single most effective thing you can do to protect yourself and others from the infection. The following is advice given to all our pupils and staff:

- It is important to encourage for everyone to carry disposable tissues with them at all times.
- Everyone must use clean tissues to cover mouth and nose when they sneeze or cough.
- Tissues must be thrown away in a bin once used.
- Hands must be washed thoroughly with soap and water after using tissues.
- We will not be providing face masks as scientific evidence shows that these basic masks do not protect people from becoming infected.
- We do provide alcohol hand gel in our dining rooms, computer rooms and in younger pupils' classrooms.
- Posters are in all areas of the Schools encouraging all pupils and staff to prevent the spread of germs.
- We also have a pandemic flu cleaning protocol for our caretakers and cleaning staff.

The Government has been planning for a flu pandemic for a number of years and whilst the situation is serious, there is good reason for us to be confident that we can deal with it. The Government has a very good stockpile of antiviral drugs; whilst not a cure, they help recovery by relieving some of the symptoms, reducing the length of time you are ill and by reducing serious complications.

Please also be reassured it is safe to eat pork and pork products as there is no evidence that swine flu can be transmitted through eating meat from infected animals.

Any concerns please do not hesitate to contact the School Nurse or for more information contact www.nhs.uk , www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu or contact NHS Direct (0845 4647).

Yours sincerely

Miss Anne Dalton
School Nurse
Merchant Taylors' Schools