



HPA advice on consideration of school closure in the event of a probable or confirmed case of “swine flu” in a school setting

The HPA recommends that when a probable or confirmed case of swine flu (A H1N1) occurs in a school setting, consideration should be given to temporarily closing the school – initially for a period of seven days.

A decision to close, or not, should be taken on the basis of an individual risk assessment for the school.

Although it would be unusual to close a school in response to a single case of ‘flu, in the light of the evidence emerging that the swine influenza can spread rapidly in the school setting, it is recommended that, if a probable or confirmed case of swine flu occurs in a school setting, consideration should be given to closing the school temporarily (initially for a period of seven days).

An individual risk assessment should be carried out which looks at the risk in relation to the specific school circumstances.

The risk analysis should address factors that might increase, or decrease, the potential for spread of the illness within the school. Factors to be considered will include:

- ❖ type and duration of exposure in the school setting,
- ❖ the nature of the illness in the presenting case,
- ❖ the nature of the school environment including:
 - the extent to which classes or year groups are separate or intermingle
 - the physical layout of classes
 - the presence or absence of communal eating facilities.

Clearly the greater the potential for spread based on consideration of the above factors, the more public health benefit may be gained from temporary closure.

If closed, a decision to re-open the school after seven days should be based on an assessment of the information that has arisen about the occurrence of further illness in the school. The school can be re-opened if there is no evidence of further spread. In addition, the school can be re-opened earlier if the probable case is subsequently demonstrated not to be due to swine influenza.

This advice applies at the current time (WHO phase 5) while the UK remains in containment mode (i.e. attempting to limit the spread of infection and establishment of community transmission). It will be reviewed if and when community transmission in the UK becomes established.

Health Protection Agency

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