



Giles Brook Primary School
Holborn Crescent
Tattenhoe
Milton Keynes
MK4 3GB

Telephone: (01908) 507627
E-Mail: gilesbrook@milton-keynes.gov.uk
Website: www.GilesBrook.org.uk
Headteacher: Philip Scull BA (Hons)
Deputy Headteacher: Angie Bailey B Ed (Hons)

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Dear Parents

Swine Flu

With the prospect of a flu pandemic looming large on the horizon I thought it might be useful to send out the official advice being given to schools by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. If and when the pandemic hits Milton Keynes, I will have to make the decision at some point as to whether or not we close the school as they are considered prime centres for spreading infection. It is important that parents inform us of any diagnosis immediately please.

If the Swine Flu virus continues to mutate and starts causing fatalities by the time it gets to Milton Keynes, then my feeling at the moment is that I would immediately close the school for a period of 5 days and await developments. The infection is likely to spread at a very fast rate and it would be no good waiting for a case at Giles Brook because by then half the school or more would be infected. This information would be sent out by letter with children if they were at school at the time or by using the MK Council website with announcements on the local radio (as with bad weather conditions). We would also place the information on our school website.

If you look at the MKC Website section on School Closures, it is now possible to register your email address and mobile number so that the Council could send you an email or text alert in the event of closure.

If it remains fairly mild as is the case at the moment, then obviously we will do all we can to remain open and minimise the risk of infection. The advice that follows is aimed at trying to limit the spread through good hygiene habits. I bought around 500 face masks for just such an eventuality for Giles Brook a few years ago but now I find that the official view is that they are of little use. All the soap in dispensers in our school is antibacterial which is what the Government is recommending.

On the last page of this letter I have copied the advice to children and I think it would be very helpful if you could put this up at home and talk through it frequently to make sure they are fully familiar with it.

Yours sincerely

Philip Scull
Headteacher

Symptoms

1. The symptoms of influenza are:

Most significant	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fever• Cough and/or shortness of breath• Sudden onset of symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aching muscles• Sore throat• Runny nose, sneezing• Loss of appetite• Headache• Malaise (lethargy, listlessness)• Chills

2. The symptoms of pandemic flu would probably be similar to those of seasonal flu, but they could be more severe and cause more serious complications. A key message during a pandemic should however be that, in case of doubt, one should assume that an infection is pandemic flu, and act accordingly. It is better that someone stays at home for a couple of days with what might turn out to be a normal cold than that they go into work or school with the early symptoms of pandemic flu and pass the flu virus on to other people.

3. The **incubation period** (the time from being exposed to the virus to showing symptoms of infection) is from one to four days: for most people, it will be 2-3 days.

4. In terms of the **infectious period** (how long you are infectious to others), people are most infectious soon after they develop symptoms, and remain infectious to some extent until the symptoms disappear. In general, adults can continue to excrete viruses for up to five days, and children for up to seven days, but occasionally longer. Over this period, the amount of virus, and therefore the infection risk to others, will decline as symptoms improve, but does not disappear until the symptoms themselves also disappear.

5. Flu, including pandemic flu, is **spread from person to person** by close contact. Some examples of how it may be spread are shown below:

- Infected people can pass the virus to others through large droplets when coughing, sneezing, or even talking within a close distance (one metre or less).
- You can catch the virus by direct contact with an infected person: for example, if you shake or hold their hand, and then touch your own mouth, eyes or nose without first washing your hands.
- You can catch the virus by touching objects (eg door handles, light switches) that have previously been touched by an infected person, then touching your own mouth, eyes or nose without first washing your hands. The virus can survive longer on hard surfaces than on soft or absorbent surfaces.

What you can do as an individual

6. Everyone can play their part in helping to reduce the spread of pandemic flu. There are two key things to remember:
 - a. Good hygiene practice – wash your hands regularly, particularly after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose;
 - b. If you have flu symptoms, do not go into work; call your manager. If you become ill at work, inform your manager and go home. If your children show flu symptoms, keep them at home.

7. You can reduce, but not eliminate, the risk of catching or spreading flu by:
 - a. Regular hand-washing;
 - b. Minimising contact between your hands and mouth/nose, unless you have just washed your hands;
 - c. Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing; use a tissue when possible, then dispose of the tissue promptly and carefully (bag it and bin it);

Children: how you should cough or sneeze, to avoid spreading lots of germs

Cover your cough

- when you cough or sneeze, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue;
- throw away your tissue, into a proper bag or bin, as soon as you've used it.
- Wash your hands

Wash your hands frequently:

On days when you are coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose, frequently wash your hands often with soap and water; or, if you can't use soap and water, use wipes or gels.

See more advice below at: "How to wash and dry your hands".

Remember:

Washing your hands is the single best way that you can help stop spreading germs that cause illness with coughs and sneezes.

How to wash and dry your hands with soap and water

- 1 Wet your hands with warm water, then add soap.
- 2 Rub in the soap, while you count to fifteen. Make sure you rub the soap into:
 - the backs of your hands;
 - the backs of your fingers;
 - your finger-nails;
 - your finger-tips;
 - the skin between your fingers.
- 3 Rinse your hands under running water.
- 4 Dry your hands with a disposable paper towel or a hot-air blower.

[If you are wearing any rings or bracelets, remove them before washing your hands. If you have any cuts or scratches, cover them with a clean dressing]