

MESSAGE TO GO TO HEADTEACHERS OF ALL SCHOOLS AND MANAGERS OF EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS

Swine flu - children returning from half-term holidays in Mexico or the USA

With a number of families taking half-term holidays this week in Mexico and the USA, where there have been more cases of swine flu than in the UK, we have asked the Health Protection Agency for advice about children returning from these countries.

Their advice is below:

The current swine flu virus is still affecting a growing number of people in a number of different countries. The current view is that the influenza caused by this virus is generally mild in nature and that children and young adults are the predominant age groups to be affected. A number of the countries where it appears that this virus may have become established within communities are popular tourist destinations where many families may be spending the current school break, such as beach resorts in Mexico and the theme parks of the United States. Currently the United States are reporting higher levels of influenza-like illness than is normal for this time of year, probably in part as a consequence of the new swine influenza virus. It is therefore possible that children of families returning from such holiday destinations as the US or neighbouring Mexico and Canada may develop a flu-like illness whilst on holiday or shortly after returning to the UK. Schools and settings should therefore consider the possibility of swine influenza if there are unexpected numbers of absences following the return to school or children become ill with flu-like symptoms such as fever, cough, runny nose, fatigue/lethargy, headache or vomiting/diarrhoea. There is evidence of rapid spread in schools and nurseries.

The key step is for these children to remain off school until they are symptom free and to seek medical advice.

Measures people can take to reduce transmission are, washing of hands, coughing and sneezing into tissue and disposal of them.

Should the head of a school become concerned about absenteeism due to illness or notice any children exhibiting the symptoms described above in the seven days following their return from holiday then they should contact their local health protection unit for advice

To summarise the key points for schools and settings:

- Healthy children with no flu-like symptoms should not be kept away from schools just because they have been to Mexico, the USA or Canada recently;

- Children returning from such countries who do display flu-like symptoms should remain at home; parents should be asked to take home any children who come in with such symptoms.

For more information and updated FAQ from DCSF about swine flu, see <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/educationoverview/flupandemic/>