

Dear Parent/Guardian,

### **Advice about preventing winter illnesses**

As winter approaches, it is likely that there will be increasing numbers of people affected by typical winter illnesses, such as sickness and diarrhoea, flu and COVID. This letter provides advice for parents and guardians on how to reduce the risk of catching and spreading these common bugs.

#### **1. General hygiene**

Handwashing is a very effective way of preventing many bugs from spreading. People should frequently wash their hands with warm water and soap, particularly after using the toilet, after using a tissue to catch a cough or sneeze, and before eating. By teaching your child how to wash their hands properly with soap for 20 seconds and using a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes they will be able to lower the risk of catching or spreading winter bugs. Remember – hand sanitizer gel is not effective against some bugs and should not be used as a replacement for handwashing, but it is a good alternative when handwashing isn't possible.

#### **2. Check that your children are up to date with vaccinations**

Vaccination offers the best form of protection from infectious diseases, reducing the risk of severe illness and helping to prevent spread. Please check that your child is up to date with their childhood vaccinations including their pre-school booster to ensure that they are well protected. A checklist of vaccinations can be found here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/> and you can contact your GP for further advice.

#### **3. Flu immunisation**

Flu can be a very unpleasant illness for children and those under five have a high rate of hospital admission with flu. The flu nasal spray is safe and free for children aged 2-3 years on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023, those in primary schools and in secondary schools up to year 11.

If your child was aged 2 or 3 years on 31 August 2023 they can get their free flu nasal spray at their GP practice. Please don't delay and contact your GP practice as soon as possible to make an appointment. For information about flu vaccination for young children please see: [5 reasons to vaccinate your under-5s against flu - UK Health Security Agency \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)

If your child is at primary school (reception to year 6) or secondary school up to year 11 they will receive their flu nasal spray at school if you returned the consent form. If your child missed their flu nasal spray at school you can contact the School Age Immunisation Service (IntraHealth) on 0333 358 3397 for advice about mop-up sessions.

And don't forget – all those in a risk group may be eligible for a free COVID and flu jab, for information about flu jabs see: [Flu vaccine - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#), and for COVID jab see: [Getting a COVID-19 vaccine - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#).

#### 4. Knowing when your child is too ill to go to school or nursery

It can sometimes be tricky to know whether to keep your child off school or nursery when they are unwell. Guidance about when to keep your child off school or nursery can be found here: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school/> and also in the table below. It is important that you follow the exclusion advice as some infections can spread easily in school or nursery.

Illness	Exclusion
Chickenpox	until all the spots have crusted over (this is usually about 5 days after the spots first appeared)
Cough and cold	can attend school or nursery with a minor cough or common cold. But if they have a fever, keep them off school until the fever goes
COVID-19	they should try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 3 days after the day they took the test
Diarrhoea and vomiting	until they have not been sick or had diarrhoea for at least 2 days (48 hours)
High temperature	keep them off school until temperature goes away
Scarlet fever	24 hours after starting antibiotics

#### 5. Getting help and advice

**If your child is unwell and you are concerned about their symptoms please contact your GP or 111 for advice.** For information about looking after a child who is unwell please see: [Looking after a sick child - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

Thank you for following these steps to help protect yourself, your family and the wider community.

With kind regards,



**Gerry Taylor**

Executive Director of Health, Housing and Communities

Sunderland City Council