



DATE: 28th November 2025

Dear Headteacher,

As autumn and winter approach, it is likely that there will be increasing numbers of people affected by typical winter illnesses, such as diarrhoea and vomiting, flu, COVID and other respiratory viral infections. This letter provides information about where and how schools can seek further advice.

Information about specific infections (including details of advised exclusion periods) in schools is available on the UKHSA website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities>.

Information for parents about when to keep their children away from school is outlined here: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school/>

Printable posters summarising the key points are also available to download here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infectious-diseases-schools-and-other-childcare-settings>

Contacting the UKHSA North East Health Protection Team (HPT):

The Health Protection Team exists to protect the population from harm when outbreaks of infectious diseases occur, or when other hazards emerge. Schools are always welcome to contact the Health Protection Team for support and advice (Tel. 0300 303 8596), especially in situations where large numbers of children are off school with similar symptoms. We are particularly keen to hear from schools when there are reports of:

- Chickenpox and scarlet fever cases occurring at the same time in the same setting – this is important as children who have had chickenpox recently can be at risk of more severe infection if they subsequently catch scarlet fever
- An unusual, rapidly increasing number of pupil or staff absences due to respiratory illness
- Severe illness (including hospitalisation) of pupils or staff
- High levels of parental concern about illness which have not been addressed through usual routes such as the guidance above

We would also encourage schools to contact us early if an outbreak (two or more cases of the same infection/illness) is suspected and the school is attended by high numbers of children with underlying medical conditions, which may make them more vulnerable to infection, or if the school is a boarding or residential setting, where additional control measures may be needed.

General advice on managing illness in school

Infections can spread easily in settings such as schools, but the following measures can help to reduce the risk of this happening.

- **Exclude unwell pupils and staff** - pupils and staff who are unwell should follow the exclusion advice outlined in NHS guidance: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school/>

- **Encourage good hand hygiene** - handwashing is a highly effective way of preventing many infections from spreading. Pupils and staff should wash their hands frequently with warm water and soap, particularly after using the toilet, after using a tissue to catch a cough or sneeze, and before eating. As they are not effective against some germs which cause diarrhoea and vomiting, hand sanitiser gels are not a suitable substitute for handwashing after using the toilet.
- **Cleaning the environment** - in addition to making sure that any vomit or diarrhoea on school premises is promptly cleaned up according to your usual protocols, increasing cleaning of surfaces that people touch a lot such as handrail, door handles, taps and toilet flushes can help to reduce spread of winter illnesses.

Vaccination

Vaccination offers the best form of protection from infectious diseases, reducing the risk of severe illness and helping to prevent outbreaks, but uptake levels have been falling in recent years. Parents should be encouraged to ensure that their children are up to date with their routine childhood vaccines including pre-school boosters. Further information can be found here: [NHS vaccinations and when to have them - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk) including some printable posters here: [Immunisations: resources for nurseries and schools - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk).

The flu nasal spray vaccine is free for children in primary schools and in secondary schools up to year 11. Parents will receive information from the School Age Immunisation Service asking them to give their consent so their child can have their free vaccination at school. Parents should be encouraged to engage in the programme and attend mop-up clinics if they miss scheduled sessions due to illness. Further information can be found here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/child-flu-vaccine/>

Closure of schools

The Health Protection Team **does not** routinely advise that schools close when there are increased levels of illness. Closing schools does not usually provide substantial additional protection against catching illnesses which are commonly circulating in the community: children and staff will still be at risk of catching winter illnesses even if the school is closed.

Schools may choose to close for business continuity or staffing reasons, or to facilitate cleaning of premises. These are decisions for school management teams to make.

Teaching resources

E-bug, operated nationally by the UKHSA, is a health education programme which aligns with the national curriculum from Early Years to Key Stage 4. It includes freely accessible teaching resources. You may find this of use in helping to educate children on good infection prevention behaviours. Please visit the following website for more information: <https://www.e-bug.eu/>

The UKHSA North East Health protection Team, have produced a series of bite sized videos regarding common winter illnesses for staff in schools and nurseries accessible at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLDAq3SAWJh0EYV6ZUy2gA2Z2e-qwDKve>

We hope that you find this helpful. Please contact the Health Protection Team on 0300 303 8596 (option 0) if you require any further information or advice.

Best wishes,

North East Health Protection Team