



## Influenza Factsheet for Parents & Carers

Thames Valley Public Health England Centre, September 2013

### What is influenza?

Influenza or 'flu' is a viral infection that mainly affects the nose, throat and the lungs. Influenza is worse than an ordinary cold. It usually starts suddenly with a high fever over 38°C which can last for 3-4 days. A dry cough, headaches and chills are common as are general muscle aches and pains. A stuffy nose, sneezing and a sore throat can also be present. Some children may also feel sick (nausea), or have diarrhoea. Tiredness can last 2-3 weeks.

### How do you catch influenza?

Influenza is mostly caught by breathing in air containing the virus when an infected person coughs/sneezes or by touching a surface where the virus has landed and then touching your mouth or nose.

### How infectious is influenza?

Influenza is infectious and can spread rapidly from person to person. Some strains of virus are more infectious than others, or cause more severe illness.

### How can you reduce the risk of influenza transmission in schools?

- Keep children and staff that are ill away from school – they should remain off school until they are symptom free.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water and dry thoroughly.
- Avoid touching surfaces (such as door handles) and then the face.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and dispose of used/dirty tissues in a bin – “Catch it, Bin it, Kill it”

### Will my child need treatment?

- Most people with the flu need no special treatment. Influenza is caused by a virus so antibiotics do not help unless there is a complication. Occasionally a special 'antiviral' medicine is given to people in the risk groups for severe illness or whose illness is getting worse.
- Someone who is ill with flu should keep warm, rest and drink lots of fluids to prevent dehydration.
- Paracetamol can be given to reduce the fever; aspirin must NOT be given to children under 16 years of age as it has been associated with the development of a severe neurological disorder called Reye's syndrome.
- It is best to stay at home while feeling ill with influenza as this reduces the chance of spreading the infection to others.

### Can you prevent influenza?

Vaccine is available to protect against flu. It is recommended for:

- People of any age with chronic heart, lung, metabolic disorders (including diabetes), liver or kidney problems or a lowered immune system due to treatment or disease.
- Pregnant women
- Everyone aged 65 and over
- From September 2013 it is also recommended for all children age two and three.