



## Advice for parents and caregivers looking after children with respiratory illnesses

There have been a lot of respiratory and diarrhoeal illnesses circulating in the community over the last few weeks. Schools in particular are reporting higher levels of absenteeism in students. Viral gastroenteritis 'Winter vomiting disease' is also circulating but this causes predominantly vomiting and diarrhoea. One of the main respiratory illnesses circulating seems to be influenza B.

### What is the illness like?

The illness comes on suddenly with a fever, headache, sore throat, dry cough, aches and pains. Occasionally it causes a tummy ache with diarrhoea and vomiting.

### Limiting the spread of the illness

- Keep sick children at home. They should not return to school until they have been better for at least 48 hours.
- Keep coughs and sneezes covered with a tissue (or at least put hand up in front of mouth). Dispose of the tissue in a rubbish bin.
- Remind children not to touch their eyes, nose, or mouth. The viruses that cause these illnesses are spread in this way.
- Make sure hands are washed and dried well after sneezing, wiping or blowing the nose, going to the toilet and before eating and preparing food.

### Are adults at risk?

Illness caused by Influenza B predominantly affects children. Most adults will have some natural immunity to influenza B viruses.

### Looking after sick children at home

- Keep your child warm and give them frequent small drinks of clear fluid, for example, water or watered-down juice.
- Give your child paracetamol or ibuprofen, if they are irritable, miserable or appear to be in pain. Check the correct dose is given. **Do not give aspirin to Children.**
- Check your child frequently, including overnight.

### What to watch out for

Most school-aged children recover in 5 to 7 days. It is important, however, that parents and caregivers also watch out for signs that their child may have developed a bacterial infection or another serious illness.

The following signs indicate you need to seek immediate medical attention for your child.

- If your child was getting well, and then develops a **high temperature (more than 38.5°C)**. This may indicate a secondary bacterial infection.
- If the child is persistently breathing faster than usual or has **difficulty breathing** for example, breathing is noisy or it is taking a lot of effort for the child to breath.
- **Persistent pain** in the chest that is worse when breathing, that doesn't go away and isn't relieved by paracetamol/ibuprofen, or that requires regular paracetamol/ ibuprofen for more than a day.
- A **rash** that looks like small bruises under the skin and doesn't go away when pressed on with a finger or a glass.
- A child that is drowsy or **not responsive**.

If your child's illness gets worse or you are concerned seek advice from your  
**GP or NHS Direct (tel 0845 4647)**

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