



26 July 2012

To parents, caregivers and staff of Schools and Early Childhood Centres (ECCs) in the Wellington and Wairarapa Regions

Information about influenza (Flu) in the region

You may have seen in the news that Christchurch has very high rates of flu. We are starting to see flu-like illness, in our region, including reports of a high numbers of children off sick at schools and ECC's. The main symptoms reported are sudden onset of sore throat, headache, fever, cough and sometimes vomiting and tummy pain. We are also aware of viral vomiting and diarrhoea in some ECC's. To prevent spread of these viral illnesses in the community there are some simple and effective steps that can be taken:

- 1. Individuals who are unwell should not be at school/childcare/work or attend social function and sports matches.** When calling your school or centre to say your child is away sick please let them know if they have flu like symptoms. People can still be infectious even when symptoms improve so ensure you stay home until 48hrs after symptoms have stopped and the child/ adult is well enough to return.

If you are worried about your own or another person's symptoms or have an underlying condition that make you vulnerable to severe illness, you should telephone Healthline 0800 611 116 or your own GP for further advice.

- 2. Prevent the spread of the virus** by ensuring everyone covers their mouth and nose with tissues when coughing and sneezing and put used tissues in a covered bin or a plastic bag. If there are no tissues available, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve – not your hands. Remember to wash your hands afterwards.
- 3. Encourage everyone to wash their hands regularly.** Clean hands are the single most important factor in preventing the spread of the virus. Wash hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water and dry them for 20 seconds with a dry towel or paper towel. You can use an alcohol-based hand gel on clean hands, visually dirty hands must be washed with soap and water first. It is very important that small children are supervised by an adult when using hand gel to make sure they do not accidentally get it in their eyes or swallow it. Alcohol hand gel should be stored safely when not in use. Hands should be washed before preparing food and eating; after coughing, sneezing, blowing your nose, or visiting the toilet. Posters can be downloaded from our website www.rph.org.nz.
- 4. Clean surfaces that are touched a lot (door handles, bench tops, toilet and bathroom areas).** Viruses can live up to 48 hours on hard surfaces. One of the most effective and cheapest disinfecting solutions to clean these surfaces is a solution of household bleach and water (see Appendix 1).
- 5. Influenza immunisation.** If your school/ ECC has not yet seen an increase in absenteeism from flu like symptoms there is still time for staff, children and pupils to get

immunised from their family doctor. This is very important for children or staff who have health conditions that may make them more susceptible to becoming very sick. The free flu immunisation for people with certain health conditions is available till 31 July 2012. It takes up to 10-14 days from the time of vaccination to develop full immunity and if somebody has already been exposed to the flu virus before immunity develops, the vaccine will not prevent infection.

If you are aware of increased numbers of sickness within a school or childcare centre then you can seek further help from Regional Public Health on 04 570 9002.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Annette Nesdale', written in a cursive style.

Annette Nesdale
Medical Officer of Health