

Dear Parent/Guardian

Winter illnesses – how you can help to protect yourself and your family

We are now well into winter and winter illnesses are continuing to circulate in the community including flu, COVID-19 and scarlet fever, which is caused by group A streptococcus.

Following the simple steps outlined in this letter can help protect children, minimise the spread of illness in schools and nurseries and protect wider communities.

1. Keep your child off school when needed

You can support your child's nursery or school and help protect others by keeping your child home when needed.

The UK Health Security Agency is asking all parents and carers to keep their child home from school or nursery if they are unwell and have a fever ([High temperature \(fever\) in children - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/fever-in-children/)). **Children should stay home until they feel better and the fever has resolved** [Back to school advice issued amid high levels of flu, COVID-19 and scarlet fever - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/back-to-school-advice-issued-amid-high-levels-of-flu-covid-19-and-scarlet-fever).

If your child has mild respiratory symptoms, like a runny nose, sore throat, or slight cough but are otherwise well, they can continue to attend school or nursery.

If your child has a tummy bug with vomiting and/or diarrhoea, **keep them off for 48 hours after symptoms have stopped.**

You can find out more about when to keep your child off school or nursery here [Is my child too ill for school? - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/when-to-keep-your-child-off-school/).

2. Check that you and your child are up to date with recommended immunisations

The best way to protect against infections is to have the immunisations available to you and your child.

Routine immunisation

It is very important that your child is up to date with their routine immunisations – if you are not sure please contact your GP surgery and they will be able to help. Your child can catch up on any missed immunisations at any time.

Flu immunisation

It's not too late to get a flu jab if you are eligible. Flu can be a very unpleasant illness in children and those under five have a high rate of hospital admission with flu. At the moment there is a high level of flu in the community. The best way to prevent your child from being unwell is by having the flu nasal spray as soon as possible.

If your child was aged 2 or 3 years on 31 August 2022 (born between 1 September 2018 and 31 August 2020) they can get their flu nasal spray at their GP practice. Please don't delay and contact your GP practice as soon as possible to make an appointment

If your child is at primary school (reception to year 6) they should have received 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 immunisation team on 0191 4028179** for advice. The last date for school age children to receive the flu nasal spray will be 27-01-2023. If your child is in an at risk group you can contact your GP surgery for advice.

And don't forget - all adults age 50 years and older and those in certain risk groups including pregnant women are eligible for a free flu jab, which can be accessed at a persons GP practice or participating local pharmacies [Flu vaccine - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/flu-vaccine).

3. Teach your child the importance of good hand hygiene and how to cover their coughs and sneezes

By teaching your child how to wash their hands properly with soap for 20 seconds, using a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes and keeping away from others when feeling unwell they will be able to lower the risk of catching, or spreading winter bugs. The [e-bugs](#) website can help you to explain to your child what good hygiene habits are and why they are important.

4. Scarlet fever

Scarlet fever is an illness caused by the bug Group A Strep. You may have seen in the news recently that there has been an increase in these types of infections.

The first signs of scarlet fever can be flu-like symptoms, including a high temperature, a sore throat and swollen neck glands (a large lump on the side of your neck).

A rash appears 12 to 48 hours later. It looks like small, raised bumps and starts on the chest and tummy, then spreads. The rash makes your skin feel rough, like sandpaper.

You should see your GP or call 111 if you or your child:

- have scarlet fever symptoms
- do not get better in a week (after seeing a GP)
- have scarlet fever and chickenpox at the same time
- are ill again, weeks after scarlet fever got better – this can be a sign of a complication, such as [rheumatic fever](#)

- are feeling unwell and have been in contact with someone who has scarlet fever

More information can be found on the NHS website [Scarlet fever - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/scarlet-fever/).

5. Getting help and advice

Remember - if your child is unwell and you are concerned about their symptoms please contact your GP or 111 for advice. Please see [Looking after a sick child - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/looking-after-a-sick-child/) for information about how to care for your child if they are unwell.

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