

## **PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT FOR NORTHLAND SCHOOLS**

It is likely that some if not most of the illness that is sweeping through Northland schools at the moment is H1N1 (swine flu).

For most people swine flu is a mild to moderate illness which can be managed at home. However some people suffer complications. At-risk groups include:

- children under the age of 5 years
- pregnant women
- people with chronic health conditions
- those who are significantly overweight

Last year there were 56 hospital admissions in Northland with severe illness caused by H1N1 influenza and half of these were under the age of 20 years. Usually most of the cases hospitalised with influenza are elderly.

Our key messages for parents and schools are:

### **1. Sick children and staff should go home until they feel better**

People are most infectious when they first develop symptoms so this is the most important time for them to avoid contact with other people.

### **2. Phone your doctor or Healthline (0800 611 116) for advice if you get sick**

Unlike the common cold which can develop over a number of days, symptoms of influenza come on quickly and can include a high fever, headache, cough, sore throat, tiredness and generally aching all over. The symptoms of influenza caused by the pandemic influenza strain can be treated by antivirals which are best started within the first 24-48 hours. This is especially important for the above at risk groups or those whose condition worsens.

### **3. Promote washing and drying of hands and cough etiquette (covering coughs and sneezes)**

Studies show that hand hygiene and cough etiquette can dramatically cut down the risk of transmission of respiratory viruses such as influenza. Some schools use strategically placed bottles of hand sanitiser to help with this.

### **4. It is not too late for people at risk of complications to be vaccinated**

Influenza vaccine is still available for people at risk of complications and people aged over the age of 65 years. Contact your family doctor for more information on influenza vaccination.

Please contact your local public health nurse for more information on influenza or look on the Ministry of Health website at <http://www.moh.govt.nz/influenza-a-h1n1>