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Dear Principal,

This email probably confirms what you are already aware of in relation to illnesses and school absence. Currently there is a high incidence of **flu (influenza)** in the under-20 age group. There is a significant rise in positive laboratory tests that confirm this as seasonal influenza.

Additionally, we are aware of an increased number of sporadic outbreaks of **norovirus**, commonly known as the “Winter vomiting bug”. There is also an increased number of cases of **mumps** occurring at this time.

**Flu (influenza)**

         The onset of flu is often noticed by feeling generally unwell or ‘off form’. This may be followed by episodes of feeling cold or shivery (this usually indicates a rise in temperature). Sore throat, coughing and generalised aches often follow.

         We advise that people affected should stay at **home for at least 5 days** after the symptoms begin, to prevent the spread of illness to others.

         While it is well known that flu spreads by coughing or sneezing, people often don’t realise that it spreads most effectively by contaminated hands passing the virus to other hands and surfaces. **Therefore, good hand hygiene is important to prevent the spread of flu**.

         People should cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and dispose of the tissue immediately in the bin. Obviously, **a good supply of disposable tissues helps**. If no tissue is available they should cough or sneeze into the inside of their elbow.

**Norovirus (winter vomiting bug):**

         Symptoms of norovirus often start with nausea followed shortly by sudden vomiting. The first vomiting is often projectile. The virus spreads easily after a person vomits.

         Cleaning and disinfecting contaminated surfaces after an episode of vomiting or diarrhoea by using **bleach-based** household cleaner is important in preventing the spread of illness.

         Further advice on cleaning can be obtained at <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/gastroenteric/norovirus/factsheets/howtocleanupanddecontaminateaftersomeonehasvomited/>

         Norovirus also causes watery diarrhoea, high temperature, chills and muscle aches. The illness is usually brief, with symptoms lasting about 1-2 days.

         It is extremely important that people who have been ill with vomiting or diarrhoea should **remain off school or work while symptomatic and for two full days after their last episode of vomiting or diarrhoea** in order to minimise spread to others**.**

         **Hand hygiene** (1) following contact with vomit **and** (2) after going to the bathroom are crucial in order to minimise the risk of spreading norovirus to others.

**Mumps:**

         Mumps causes swelling of the salivary glands. The parotid gland, which is under the skin in front of the ear, is most commonly affected. One side or both sides may be swollen. Other salivary glands below the jaw can also be swollen.

         People affected often feel generally unwell and may have a fever or temperature.

         95% of children in this region will have been immunised against mumps with 2 doses of MMR (given at 12 months and in Junior Infants). However, the mumps component of the vaccine is the least effective and approximately 10% of children who have received 2 doses of MMR will remain non-immune.

         Nevertheless, the best protection against mumps is to receive the 2 doses of MMR vaccine that are given free of charge by GPs (at 12 months) and in Junior Infants (School Immunisation Programme).

         Mumps is infectious for 5 days before until about 5 days after the onset of symptoms. We advise that symptomatic children should remain at home for at least 5 days after the onset of symptoms.

         Mumps is very infectious via oral secretions which can contaminate the hands. In turn this can be spread person-to-person by touch or coming in contact with surfaces that have been contaminated.

         Once again, **stringent hand hygiene** can minimise the risk of passing the mumps virus to other people.

Best wishes,

Dr Una Fallon,

Medical Officer of Health / Acting Director of Public Health

Medical Council Registration Number: 014313

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