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NEWS STATEMENT

INFORMATION UPDATE ON SWINE FLU IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

Swine flu rates increase within the region

Numbers of people attending GPs with flu-like symptoms have increased over the last week. The reported rates of GP consultations for flu and flu-like illnesses (per 100,000 population) within the West Midlands this week according to latest surveillance data is 23.3 up from 15 last week. This is similar to the England average of 23.7.

The number of people with swine flu admitted to hospital this week was 69 compared with 40 last week. 32 inpatients with swine flu were being treated in hospital yesterday (30th September).

There have been no further swine-flu related deaths in the West Midlands. This means that the number of total deaths where there has been a positive test of swine flu in the West Midlands remains at nine.

The West Midlands currently has 82 anti-viral collection points open across the region. Since the National Pandemic Flu Service was launched, over 59,000 people have collected anti-virals from one of these collection points.

The National Pandemic Flu Service, which ensures that people with flu or flu-like symptoms get the right advice and help, has to date assessed over 126,000 people from across the region.

We are aware that there are a small number of schools across the West Midlands reporting absenteeism in children with flu like symptoms. In some of these schools H1N1v has been confirmed. This is not unexpected and our surveillance and early warning systems have been helpful in identifying these cases.

Every school and early years settings in the West Midlands has been provided with swine flu information and advice to help them manage and reduce the spread of the 2009 pandemic flu strain (H1N1 swine flu) among pupils and staff during the 2009-2010 school years.

Good hygiene measures will reduce the spread of the virus and the number of children affected by swine flu.

Dr Rashmi Shukla, Regional Director Public Health, NHS West Midlands, said:

“Over the last week we have seen further increases across the region in the numbers of people reporting flu-like symptoms. This is not unexpected and we would like to remind people that they should continue to adhere to good respiratory and hand hygiene practices to reduce the chances of the virus spreading”.

“For most people swine flu is not a serious illness and they should start to feel better after a few days without needing to go to their GP or A&E.”

“However, for some people, including those with other serious medical conditions, it may be a more serious illness when a virus like this is circulating. If you have flu-like symptoms and you have long term health problems then it is important that you talk to your doctor.”

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Notes to Editors

For further information please contact the Communications Team on 0121 695 2252/81.

Long Term Health Problems include:

- *Severe asthma or diabetes, chronic lung disease, a weakened immune system, kidney or heart disease*
- *It is also important to talk to your doctor if you have flu like symptoms and are pregnant, or if it is regarding a child (under 5).*

Good Respiratory Hand Hygiene

It is important to remember that the best protective measures to stop the spread of germs are to:

- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible
- Dispose of dirty tissues promptly and carefully
- Maintain good basic hygiene - wash hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to face or to other people
- Clean hard surfaces (e.g. door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product
- Make sure your children follow this advice.

The '**Catch it, Bin it, Kill it**' slogan is an easy way to remember to act to stop the spread of germs.

- **CATCH IT** Germs spread easily. Always carry tissues and use them to catch your cough or sneeze.
- **BIN IT** Germs can live for several hours on tissues. Dispose of them as soon as possible
- **KILL IT** Hands can transfer germs to any surface you touch. Clean your hands as soon as you can.

If anyone is worried about swine flu, they should call the National Pandemic Flu Service on 0800-1513-513 and/or check their symptoms online at www.nhs.uk. If people have taken all of these steps and are still concerned people should contact NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 or phone their GP. Please don't visit A&E.