

News release

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If you have flu symptoms...stay at home

Buckinghamshire Primary Care Trust (PCT) is encouraging all of us to help reduce the impact of influenza A H1N1 (swine flu) virus in Buckinghamshire. One of the PCTs key messages is if you have flu symptoms, stay at home and contact NHS Direct for further advice - please don't go straight to your GP surgery, out-of-hours GP service or your local hospital as these services are currently under increased pressure.

We would like to advise members of the public of the correct process to follow, to receive the right treatment should they get flu like symptoms. Following these simple steps can help slow down the spread of the virus, as well as reducing the effect on our local health services.

Symptoms of influenza A (H1N1) (swine flu) are similar to those of seasonal influenza, usually a feverish illness accompanied by one, or more, of cough, sore throat, runny nose, headache and muscle and joint aches.

Advice for individuals who have flu-like symptoms, is to:

- **Stay at home, to limit contact with others and check your symptoms by calling NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or visit www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk**
- Once symptoms are checked with NHS Direct you will be given advice on the next steps to take if you are diagnosed with the virus.
- For further information on swine flu you can also ring the Swine Flu Information line on 0800 1 513 513.

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- Please **DO NOT** visit your GP surgery or a hospital, as you may spread germs to others.
- Please **DO NOT** go into A&E, minor injuries, first aid units or the out-of-hours GP service if you have flu-like symptoms or you may spread the flu to others.
- Now is the time to **choose your 'flu friend'**. A 'flu friend' is either a relative or friend in your local community who could pick up a GP's prescription or do your shopping to save you from having to venture out if you catch flu.
- Members of the public are encouraged to consider **becoming a 'flu friend'** to a vulnerable person, such as the elderly or others who may live alone, in your area. Your local parish council or village association may be able to help identify suitable people.

Dr Jane OGrady, Director of Public Health , Buckinghamshire PCT, explains that “flu is usually spread from one person to another when an infected person has symptoms (i.e. coughing and sneezing). The single most important thing we can all do to help reduce the impact of swine flu is to make sure we have good basic respiratory and hand hygiene.” This means following the CATCH IT, BIN IT, KILL IT advice, by:

- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible.
- Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully.
- Maintaining good basic hygiene, for example washing hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to face or to other people.
- Cleaning hard surfaces (such as door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product.
- Making sure your children follow this advice.

In line with the national picture, Buckinghamshire has seen an increase in the numbers of people suffering from Swine Flu. Although the number of cases is increasing it is important to see swine flu in context and not to panic. All confirmed cases in Buckinghamshire have been relatively mild and are responding well to treatment at home. This reflects the national picture which indicates that the symptoms of swine flu are similar to those of seasonal (winter) flu. Across England and Wales there are about 8,000 seasonal flu related deaths each year. So far only a handful of people have died from swine flu, most with underlying health problems.

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Approximately up to 15% of the population develop seasonal flu each year – in Bucks this is up to about 78,000 people. Currently there are relatively few confirmed cases of swine flu in Bucks.

Buckinghamshire Primary Care Trust (PCT) and Thames Valley Health Protection Unit have well established plans in place to deal with swine flu. These plans have worked well during the containment phase (trying to slow down the spread of the virus in the community). In line with national policy we have now moved to the treatment phase where the priority is to give antivirals to people who are diagnosed with swine flu.

Ends

For more information contact Buckinghamshire Primary Care Trust's media team on tel: 01494 552256