

Flu Vaccination Information and Advice Update for Blundell's Pupils and Parents

Influenza: The colder autumn and winter months herald the onset of the influenza (flu) season. Flu is a viral respiratory illness that can spread rapidly amongst communities and is spread from person to person via coughing, sneezing and even talking. It can also be spread via contact with contaminated surfaces, such as door handles and telephones. People can be infectious up to one day before the onset of symptoms and up to 5-7 days after becoming sick. Symptoms of flu can vary from mild to severe. Generally, the symptoms of a mild illness can include:

- runny nose
- cough
- headache
- sore throat
- fever
- lethargy
- muscle aches
- general weakness
- diarrhoea /vomiting

In more severe cases, these symptoms can persist and cause additional complications such as pneumonia and dangerous worsening of pre-existing conditions such as asthma and diabetes.

Prevention: To avoid the spread of the flu virus, people should stay away from obviously sick people and stay home if sick. It is important to wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub. Linens, eating utensils, and dishes belonging to those who are sick should not be shared without washing thoroughly first. Further, frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected at home, work and school, especially if someone is ill. Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and then disposing in the bin is also effective. **Remember 'Catch it, Bin it, Kill it.'**

Vaccination: A flu vaccine is available every year to offer some protection against the illness. While there are many different flu viruses, a flu vaccine protects against the three viruses that research suggests will be most common in any given year. Since it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body that protect against flu infection, it is best that people get vaccinated early so they are protected before it begins spreading in their community. Protection lasts about one year although it may not offer full protection to everyone who is vaccinated. The flu vaccine does not cause flu but those vaccinated may have mild side effects such as a headache and localized soreness at the injection site. These usually disappear 1-2 days without treatment. Most people can receive the flu vaccine although known allergies to eggs and certain components of the vaccine may mean it is contraindicated. In addition, you should postpone having the vaccine if you are ill with a fever or acute infection. Your GP or nurse can advise.

Certain groups of people may be offered a free flu vaccine from their GP including those at high risk of complications of the illness. These include people who have:

- asthma
- diabetes
- heart conditions
- immuno-compromised
- plus certain other medical groups which can be clarified with the GP

At Blundell's, the flu vaccine is offered to all our full and weekly boarders. Written parental or guardian consent is required and a small fee will be charged to the termly bill. Those pupils at high risk are eligible for a free vaccine. Our flexi and day pupils should contact their family GP if they are interested in vaccination.

Management: Should you develop symptoms of flu, management involves having plenty of rest, taking fluids to keep hydrated and fever / symptom control with over the counter medicines such as Paracetamol. Complications should be managed by your family doctor. Please note that Aspirin should not be given to under 16's for fever control due to the small but serious risk of Reye's syndrome.