

Press release

UKHSA reminds parents of back-to-school advice

UK Health Security Agency reminds parents of back-to-school advice amid rising levels of winter illness in the new year.

From:

[UK Health Security Agency](#)

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Parents are urged to take simple steps to give their children the best start to the new school term and protect their communities following the Christmas break.

As levels of winter illnesses including flu, COVID-19 and norovirus continue to rise, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is reminding parents of 5 simple steps they can take to reduce viruses spreading in the community – helping their children make a healthy start to the year and minimising the impact of illness on attendance as schools head back and parents return to work.

Teach good hygiene habits

Encouraging good hand-washing habits is one of the most effective ways to stop the spread. Regularly wash hands in soap and warm water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser when convenient.

Using a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes, binning it and then washing hands will help prevent infection from spreading.

Our [e-bug](#) resources for all ages can help you to explain and discuss hygiene habits – and why they are important – to your child or teenager.

Stopping the spread of stomach bugs

Along with rising cases of norovirus, UKHSA has also been seeing higher levels of other gastrointestinal infections, such as Shiga toxin-producing E.coli.

If you or your child have diarrhoea and vomiting, washing your hands with soap and warm water and using bleach-based products to clean surfaces will help stop infections from spreading. Don't prepare food for others if you have symptoms or for 48 hours after symptoms stop.

If you are unwell, you should avoid visiting people in hospitals and care homes to avoid passing on the infection to those more vulnerable in these settings. Do not return to work, school or nursery until 48 hours after your symptoms have stopped.

Spot the signs of when to keep your child at home

While children are encouraged to stay in education or childcare with symptoms such as a runny nose, sore throat or slight cough (if otherwise well and do not have a high temperature), children should stay home from school or nursery if they're displaying the following symptoms:

If your child has a fever and is unwell, they should stay home from school or nursery until the fever has passed and they are well enough to attend.

If your child has diarrhoea and/or vomiting, they should stay off school or nursery for at least 48 hours after their symptoms clear up – this will help stop the spread of stomach bugs.

At this time of year, other types of illnesses that circulate are scarlet fever and chickenpox, as cases usually peak in late winter and early spring.

Symptoms of [scarlet fever](#) include sore throat, fever, swollen neck glands, a bumpy rash on the tummy, flushed cheeks and 'strawberry tongue'. If you suspect your child has scarlet fever, contact your local GP; and if diagnosed stay away from nursery or school for 24 hours after the first dose of antibiotics.

Chickenpox is highly contagious, with the most common symptom being an itchy, spotty rash. If your child has [chickenpox](#), keep them off school until all the spots have crusted over.

Get vaccinated

Vaccination offers the best protection against flu and is given as a quick and painless nasal spray for children. However, vaccine uptake amongst pre-school children is one of the lowest, despite the illness being more serious for this ages group in some cases.

Children eligible for the flu vaccine include:

- children aged 2 to 3 years old on 31 August in 2023
- all primary school-aged children (reception to year 6)
- secondary school-aged children (year 7 to year 11)
- children aged 6 months and older with long-term health conditions

Similar to the flu vaccine, there has been a drop in uptake of routine childhood immunisations, which protect children against diseases such as measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria and polio. You can take a look at the [childhood vaccination schedule](#) to make sure your child is up to date with all their vaccinations.

Use NHS resources

NHS UK provides easily accessible guidance for parents to [help manage winter illness at home](#).

Dr Catherine Falconer, Deputy Director Health Equity and Inclusion Health at UKHSA, said:

The winter period can see an increase in some of the common seasonal viruses which disrupt children's education and cause more serious illnesses. As children head back to school, there are steps parents and families can take to keep a household healthy this January whilst also preventing infections from spreading when children are poorly. By following this guidance, parents are also protecting the wider community.

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