



To all schools, early child care centres and kohanga reo,

**Re: Influenza-like illnesses  
Gastroenteritis  
Meningococcal disease**

**THIS IS A REMINDER TO ALL SCHOOLS AND THEIR STUDENTS, PARENTS AND CARERS**

Winter is the season for many cold and flu-like illnesses, stomach bugs (gastroenteritis), in particular norovirus, and is also the season for Meningococcal disease. We have started to see a number of different viruses circulating in the community.

Some schools are seeing a large number of their student roll absent with such illnesses. If parents or caregivers are concerned about their child's health, they should seek medical advice.

**Influenza-like illness**

Winter is the time for coughs, colds and influenza-like illnesses including influenza. The influenza virus circulating this year is the same as last year (the swine flu). Children should remain away from school until well.

Most of the above illnesses are caused by viruses which are spread via droplets by someone coughing or sneezing into their hand, then not washing it and passing it to someone else's hand or a surface which then becomes contaminated.

Those individuals who now have the virus on their hands can easily rub their eyes or put their hand in their mouths, without thinking, and thus transfer the virus to themselves.

Therefore, regular cleaning in schools is even more important at this time. It is also recommended that children practice good cough and sneeze etiquette and hand hygiene.

**Stomach bugs (Gastro intestinal illnesses)**

Winter sees a peak in stomach bugs; especially those caused by viruses. Children should be kept from school if they have vomiting and/or diarrhoea and should not return until they are well and have had at least 24 hours of no diarrhoea and/or vomiting.

These viruses are spread via hands to mouths. They can remain on surfaces such as door handles, hence regular cleaning is encouraged.

If the school has two or more cases associated with a specific room or year group, they are encouraged to discuss this with Population Health. Population Health has guidelines available for institutions regarding gastro intestinal illnesses, and their prevention.

Please encourage hand washing before preparing food, eating meals and after visiting the toilet.

### **Meningococcal disease**

Even with the number of cases of MeNZB decreasing, there will always be cases of meningococcal disease in the Waikato. It is assumed that without any MeNZB cases, Waikato will still see approximately five to 10 cases of other strains of meningococcal disease a year.

We would like to take this opportunity to remind you of the signs and symptoms of the disease. Meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning) are not always easy to recognise, and symptoms can appear in any order. Some may not appear at all. In the early stages, the signs and symptoms can be similar to many other more common illnesses; for example flu.

***Trust your instincts. If you suspect meningitis or septicaemia, get medical help immediately.***

Early symptoms can include fever, headache, photophobia (not able to look at light), nausea (feeling sick), vomiting (being sick), a rash and muscle pain, with cold hands and feet.

A rash that does not fade under pressure can be a sign of meningococcal septicaemia. This rash may begin as a few small spots anywhere on the body and can spread quickly to look like fresh bruises.

The spots or rash are caused by blood leaking into the tissues under the skin. They are more difficult to see on darker skin, so look on paler areas of the skin and inside the lower eyelid. The spots or rash may fade at first, so keep checking.

However, if someone is ill or is obviously getting worse, do not wait for spots or a rash to appear. They may appear late or may not appear at all.

If your child is unwell and you are in doubt please seek medical advice.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Anita Bell', written in a cursive style.

Dr Anita Bell  
Medical Officer of Health  
Population Health, Waikato DHB