

Wednesday 18th December 2019

Dear Headteachers

Hygiene and Handwashing

We know that many of you will have been challenged this winter by outbreaks of diarrhoea and vomiting amongst children and staff. We have seen high levels of Norovirus across the West Midlands this year as well as a higher than normal level of other viral conditions which could be reduced through good hygiene and handwashing.

As you approach the end of term it is a good time to review the school approach to handwashing and hygiene and consider what you can put in place over the Christmas break to prepare for the Spring term.

In schools and nurseries many common viral infections are spread through direct contact with contaminated surfaces such as door handles, table tops, stair rails, taps and toilet seats and flush handles. These viruses are very resilient and, depending on environmental factors, and can survive for long periods on hard surfaces. This is why regular cleaning with appropriate products is so essential in limiting the spread of these diseases –described on page 20 in the Public Health England guidance called '[The Spotty Book: Notes on infectious diseases in schools](#)'.

Handwashing, using hot water and soap, is the most important and evidence-based step to prevent contamination and spread. It is important to note that alcohol gels are not effective at killing many of these viruses and handwashing with hot water and soap is the best way to stop these infections spreading. Public Health England has released a 'norovirus toolkit for schools' which provides more detailed advice, alongside the [winter illness advice for schools](#). There are also [NHS resources](#) to support early years settings.

Through the work of our Environmental Health Officers we have become aware that some schools have struggled to maintain hygienic toilets and could strengthen their cleaning routines. We would ask you to consider a robust deep clean of the toilets during the holiday breaks as a way to ensure that you start the new term in the best possible way to prevent further infections.

Yours sincerely



Dr Tim O'Neill
Director Education and Skills



Dr Justin Varney
Director of Public Health