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Friday 13th March 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re: Coronavirus update

At St Mary's, we take the health and safety of our pupils and staff very seriously, so we're sharing guidance from Public Health England on steps you should be taking. Please see below for an update.

There is currently **no cause for concern** at the school, but we'll keep you informed about any developments and ensure as always we're keeping the school clean to prevent the spread of any virus.

Information about the virus

A coronavirus is a type of virus. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world. COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China in January 2020.

The incubation period of COVID-19 is between 2 and 14 days. This means that if a person remains well 14 days after contact with someone with confirmed coronavirus, it is unlikely that they have been infected.

The following symptoms may develop in the 14 days after exposure to someone who has COVID-19 infection:

- Cough
- Difficulty in breathing
- Fever

Generally, these infections can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease. There is no evidence that children are more affected than other age groups – very few cases have been reported in children.

How COVID-19 is spread

From what we know about other coronaviruses, spread of COVID-19 is most likely to happen when there is close contact (within 2m) with an infected person. It is likely that the risk increases the longer someone has close contact with an infected person.

Droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes (termed respiratory secretions) containing the virus are most likely to be the most important means of transmission.

There are 2 routes by which people could become infected:

- secretions can be directly transferred into the mouths or noses of people who are nearby (within 2m) or could be inhaled into the lungs

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- it is also possible that someone may become infected by touching a surface or object that has been contaminated with respiratory secretions and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes (such as touching a door knob or shaking hands then touching own face).

There is currently no good evidence that people who do not have symptoms are infectious to others.

Prevent the spread of infection

Make sure you and your children follow these general principles to prevent spreading any respiratory virus:

- Wash your hands often – with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or an alcohol-based sanitiser if soap and water aren't available. This is particularly important after taking public transport
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- People who feel unwell should stay at home and should not attend work, any education or childcare setting
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in a bin
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home
- If you're worried about your symptoms, please use the NHS 111 online tool or phone 111 for advice – don't go directly to your GP or other healthcare environment

Pupils, staff, governors and visitors should wash their hands:

- Before leaving home
- On arrival at school
- After using the toilet
- After breaks and sporting activities
- Before food preparation
- Before eating any food, including snacks
- Before leaving school

If you or your children have returned from a category 1 country in past 14 days

- Self-isolate for 14 days after leaving the country or area (see the home isolation sheet for help with this)
- If you become unwell, call NHS 111 immediately for an assessment (or 999 if you require emergency medical attention) – see below for the symptoms to look out for

If you or your children have returned from a category 2 country or area in last 14 days

If you or your children are well:

- You don't need to avoid contact with other people
- Your other family members don't need to take any precautions or make any changes to their own activities

If you become unwell (see below for a list of symptoms):

- Stay indoors and avoid contact with other people as you would with other flu viruses (see the [home isolation advice sheet](#) for help with this)
- Call NHS 111 immediately for an assessment (or 999 if you require emergency medical attention)

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According to other official guidance, while you wait for further advice:

- Avoid contact with others
- Stay at home – don't go to work or school
- Don't travel while sick
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing, throwing tissues in a covered bin immediately
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (or an alcohol-based sanitiser if soap and water aren't available)

7 days isolation directive

Following the directive from central government we are asking members of our community to isolate themselves if showing any symptoms of a new cough, fever and/or difficulty breathing, for 7 days. Please be mindful of this if your child is presenting with these symptoms and do not send them in to school. Please prevent the spread of infection and act responsibly.

Personal responsibility

As safeguarding our children is our highest priority, we would also appreciate it, if you inform the school of any suspected or confirmed cases within your family to ensure that we are able to risk assess the situation appropriately, minimizing the spread of infection.

Handwashing

Soap is provided in school which is PH neutral. Due to the frequency of handwashing this does have an impact on the skin. Should your child wish to bring in their own hand cream, please make personal arrangements for this. Under no account must this be shared with other children.

Social Distancing

Although not officially directed by central government at this stage, as a precautionary measure, school will be cancelling visits to other schools or sporting events coming up until the end of April. This is to limit the potential exposure. Walks in the local community will still continue. Families are also advised to consider what you do in a typical week and what steps you would need to take to limit non-essential contact with others.

School Closure

Wherever possible, school will remain open. School will only close if directed by public health or if staffing shortages mean that it would not be safe to open the school.

Good Hygiene

All staff and children have been and are continuing to be briefed on the importance of hygiene and have had lessons specifically on hand washing. We would appreciate it if all parents/carers continue to reinforce these messages at home.

If you have any further concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to contact the school office.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs S M Hall

Head Teacher

