Key Stage 3

Infection Prevention and Control (IPC): Respiratory Hygiene Teacher Guidance

Background Information

Colds and flus are the most common illnesses in the classroom and perhaps one of the most contagious. Coronavirus is a respiratory illness that is transmitted in a similar way to colds and flu's. The most common mode of transmission for RTIs is through close contact with respiratory droplets in the air from coughs and sneezes or through contact with contaminated surfaces. Most droplets are heavy and only fall within 1m – to 1.5m of people. However, there are smaller droplets that last in the air for longer (airborne) and travel further. Examples: the common cold (droplet) and measles (airborne). Microbes can also be spread more directly, through person-to-person contact and contact with contaminated surfaces or objects. The virus can be spread by getting into the non-infected person's nose or eyes because they touch their face with contaminated hands.

Sneezing is a way in which our body tries to get rid of any harmful microbes and particles we might inhale from getting deeper into our respiratory tract. The harmful microbes and dust get caught on the nose hair and tickle our nose. The nose sends a message to the brain which then sends a message back to your nose, mouth, lungs and chest telling them to blow the irritation away. In the case of colds, millions of viral particles rush out and contaminate the surfaces on which they land; this could be our food or hands. While a sneeze can travel at 100mph through the air and spread cold/flu virus over 20 feet away from the infected person, particles from a cough can travel up to 3m in a matter of seconds and could linger in the air for more than a minute.

Good respiratory hygiene is especially important in the approach to the winter cold/ flu season each year, and when there is an outbreak of some kinds of infection. Common symptoms of RTIs include a headache, sore throat and fever, and sometimes a runny or blocked nose. These infections can also cause sneezing and/or coughing, loss of taste or smell, and rarely nausea/vomiting or diarrhoea.

How to prevent the spread of harmful microbes from coughs or

- **Catch** it: cover your mouth and nose with a tissue. If you don't have a tissue, cover with your upper sleeve or elbow (not your hands).
- **Bin** it: throw away the used tissue at once to avoid spreading infection to surfaces, or other people.

- **Kill** it: wash your hands well with soap and water, or hand sanitiser if soap and water are not available, immediately after throwing the tissue in the bin.

Another way of preventing the spread of respiratory illness is learning how to successfully practice good respiratory hygiene when we cough or sneeze. It is a natural reflex to put our hands towards our faces when we sneeze, but it is important to replace this action with new habits of respiratory hygiene to reduce the spread of infection. We can prevent some of these infections (like the flu and coronavirus) by getting vaccinations.

Where there is an outbreak of infection it is important that you wash your hands more often and for 20 seconds and follow key guidance on respiratory hygiene. You may also be asked to wear a facemask and keep a certain distance from people.

SW2 Respiratory Hygiene Quiz

How can you spread microbes to others?

- Touching
- Sneezing
- Coughing

After we sneeze into our hands, we should:

- Wash our hands

If you do not have a tissue available, the best option from the following is to sneeze:

- Into your sleeve

When sneezing, the best way to stop microbes from spreading is:

- To use a tissue to cover your sneeze

What should you do with a tissue after sneezing into it?

- Put it straight in the bin

What might happen if we don’t wash our hands after sneezing into them?

- Transfer harmful microbes to other people