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<b>FROM</b>	<b>Ramsey Richards, Attendance and Prosecution Service Manager, Education Support Services and Public Health England</b>	<b>Priority 1</b>	
<b>TO</b>	<b>Head Teachers and Principals</b>		
<b>CC</b>	<b>Chairs of Governors, Attendance Leads, School Nurses School office staff (who take absence phone calls from parents)</b>		
<b>STATUS</b>	<b>For information</b>	<b>ACTION BY</b>	
<b>CIRCULAR REFERENCE</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>ISSUE DATE</b>	<b>Friday 1 September 2017</b>

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**Important: please ensure this information is passed to your Chair of Governors.**

## Public Health England (PHE): information and guidelines for schools and academies

1. Supporting schools to effectively challenge and reduce parentally condoned illness absence
2. Winter-readiness information for PHE West Midlands schools and nurseries

The Department for Education (DfE) data shows us that illness can be a major contributory factor in the absence of many children from school. Schools, academies and the local authority (LA) have a shared duty to protect the education of children. Together, we can maximise engagement with learning, leading to positive futures for the children of Sandwell.

- Parents who may be condoning their child's absences need to be challenged by schools/academies – duty to protect children's education.
- Challenge is not always easy. Schools/academies may, however, come under scrutiny by Ofsted if they are authorising absences without having evidence to justify such authorisation.
- As you know, the LA can only accept referrals on the basis of UNAUTHORISED Absence. By not authorising absence without appropriate medical evidence you enable yourselves to access the statutory support available from the Attendance and Prosecution Service.

GPs/doctors surgeries do not want to see lots of children suffering with minor ailments which can be managed via a pharmacist with *over the counter* medication. Parents need to understand that it is not necessary to keep a child off with most common childhood illnesses. Together we can influence parents' way of thinking.

## Knowledge is power - what the medical professionals say...

Many childhood illnesses do not require children to be absent from school.

Visit [Public Health England - Guidance on Infection Control in Schools and other Childcare Settings](#) for more information.

Please see the following examples where the recommended period of absence from school is 0 (zero) days:

- Headache, earache, stomach ache
- High temperature
- Coughs and colds
- Head lice

If staff who take calls from parents are equipped with guidance, they can confidently encourage and advise parents to send their child to school in line with accepted medical advice.

The attached PHE guidance provides useful information.

- [Sickness absence in schools: a guide to staff](#)
- [Sickness absence in schools: a guide to parents](#)
- [Winter-readiness information for PHE West Midlands schools and nurseries](#)

You are advised to share the parents' guide and inform parents that when they report their child's absence they will be asked to discuss whether time off is recommended or not.

Making the reduction of illness absence a priority requires schools, academies and health to be giving consistent messages to parents.

GPs want to keep the number of unnecessary appointments to a minimum.

By using Public Health England Guidelines and insisting that children come into school, less GP appointments will be taken up by parents seeking 'medical evidence' to support avoidable absence from school.

Ultimately it is for the Head Teacher to decide if an absence is to be authorised, not for a parent to make this decision.

The linked PHE guidelines attached will provide you with useful information. Schools will have an opportunity to discuss this circular/guidance at the Attendance Forum on 28 September 2017 [see [circular 132](#)]

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### Additional circular information

#### Attachments:

- Sickness absence in schools: a guide to staff
- Sickness absence in schools: a guide to parents
- Winter-readiness information for PHE West Midlands schools and nurseries