

INFORMATION SHEET FOR SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND CENTRES OF EDUCATION ON INFLUENZA A(H1N1)

This information sheet gives general information about Influenza A(H1N1) (which has been referred to as Swine Influenza) as well as anticipating questions that may arise within a school, college, or centre of education. In particular it advises on what can be done to help prevent the spread of the Influenza and what should be done if a student develops flu-like symptoms whilst at school, college or centre of education (hereafter referred to as school/college). This document will be updated to take account of other questions that may arise or as circumstances change.

What is Influenza A(H1N1)?

Influenza A(H1N1) is a type of influenza. It causes respiratory disease in humans, pigs and birds. The current variety of Influenza A(H1N1) is a type that was primarily be found in pigs. Up to this, human cases of influenza A(H1N1) have most commonly occurred in people who have been in close proximity to pigs but it is possible for influenza A(H1N1) viruses to spread from person to person, as is being seen now. Cases of human infection with influenza A(H1N1) virus have recently been confirmed in a number of countries particularly Mexico, and the U.S.A.

Is there any requirement at present for schools/colleges to close?

Schools/colleges should continue to operate normally unless advised by local Department of Public Health staff in the Health Service Executive (HSE). The current advice from the Department of Health and Children to the effect that there is no current issue regarding schools/colleges closing and may be found at <http://www.dohc.ie> This will be updated by the Department of Health and Children as needs be.

What are the symptoms of Influenza A(H1N1)?

The symptoms of Influenza A(H1N1) are similar to the symptoms of normal human, seasonal influenza and include fever, fatigue, coughing, sore throat, runny nose, headache and pains in the limbs or the joints. Some people with Influenza A(H1N1) have also reported vomiting and diarrhoea. Anyone developing these symptoms who has recently returned from a Influenza A(H1N1) affected area, or who has been in contact with another *confirmed* case of Influenza A(H1N1), is advised to stay at home and contact their GP or Out-Of-Hours GP service immediately, by telephone. **It is important that they do not go into their GP's surgery or A&E Department, but that they stay at home where, if necessary, they will be visited by a doctor.**

Should students who have recently returned from affected countries, be kept away from schools/colleges?

No. As long as they are well and not suffering from flu-like symptoms, there is no reason for these students to be kept away from school/college and they can carry on with their normal routine. They should, however, be vigilant for the symptoms of flu and, at the first signs of these, should stay at home and get in contact with their GP.

What action should be taken if a student develops flu-like symptoms whilst at school/college?

If a student develops flu-like symptoms at school/college, arrangements should be made for him/her to be taken home and where the student is an adult he/she should be advised about contacting his/her GP as soon as possible. Where the student is a minor the parents should be advised about contacting their GP as soon as possible. Whilst waiting to go home, the student should be placed in a suitable area, such as a small office, away from other students, but where an eye can be kept on them to ensure that they are all right.

If they have recently returned from a country affected by Influenza A(H1N1), they should be taken straight home and advised, and/or their parents advised, to call the GP from home.

If the student has recently returned from a Influenza A(H1N1) affected country and their symptoms are compatible with Influenza A(H1N1), then appropriate tests will be arranged. Until the results of these tests are available, no further action is needed by the school/college. Even in people returning from affected countries with flu-like symptoms, the vast majority of tests turn out to be negative. It would, therefore, be premature to take action until the test results are known. The test results are available in a timely fashion and within plenty of time to take appropriate action, should they turn out to be positive. It is important that school/college life should continue as normal while the results are awaited.

If the result turns out to be positive, the school/college will immediately be contacted and informed by the local Department of Public Health of the HSE. The Department of Public Health will work closely with the school/college to put in place actions to protect staff and students. Detailed plans and procedures have been developed by the HSE to assess the wider public health risk in schools/colleges for this eventuality. It is important to point out that outside of Mexico, Influenza A(H1N1) has, to date, been a relatively mild illness.

Schools/colleges are asked not to contact the local Department of Public Health (HSE) where a child develops flu-like symptoms whilst at school/college. GPs will advise the local Department of Public Health (HSE), if they think there is a concern and the Department of Public Health (HSE) will advise schools/colleges as warranted.

What is the position if a student is due to take a State examination and becomes ill or is being monitored as a possible influenza case?

The State Examinations Commission (SEC) makes arrangements each year to accommodate examination candidates that are ill, injured, or where a student has to be isolated from other students. These arrangements include where appropriate, setting up special individual candidate centres and making arrangements for taking the examination in hospital. In this regard if a student scheduled to take the Leaving or Junior Certificate examinations is diagnosed with Influenza A(H1N1) or, is being monitored as a suspected case, the SEC should be contacted in the normal way with any advice made available to the school by the health authorities.

What about a student, who was at school/college and is now off school with flu-like symptoms?

As with the situation above, if the student has recently returned from an Influenza A(H1N1) affected area, it is important that this is reported to the GP, who will visit them at home so that they can be investigated and tested. Again, the school/college should take no action until the test results become available and, if positive, the school/college will be contacted by local Department of Public Health staff and the action plans will be put into place.

How will a school/college know if it should close?

If a student in your school/college is diagnosed as being a probable or confirmed case of human influenza A(H1N1) the local Department of Public Health (HSE) will work closely with the school/college. The Department of Public Health will advise the school/college management on the appropriate action to take, including advising whether a class group should remain at home or whether the entire school/college should close. Schools/colleges should follow strictly the advice given by public health professionals in relation to these matters. It may also be possible that some students and staff at the school/college will be provided with anti-viral medication.

A list of the Department of Public Health offices (HSE) is attached for your information at [http://www.hse.ie/eng/Find a Service/Public Health/](http://www.hse.ie/eng/Find_a_Service/Public_Health/)

As is normally the case where management finds it is necessary to close some or all of the school/college it is not necessary to obtain the Department of Education and Science's approval in advance. Schools/colleges should simply act in accordance with the advice of the health authorities. A school/college closing on foot of advice is however requested to advise the Department of Education and Science of the position without delay.

By continuing contact from the public health staff, a school/college will be advised on when it may re-open.

What if a cluster of schools/colleges are advised to close or it is decided that schools/colleges countrywide should close?

Any decision, based on public health advice, to close a range of or all schools/colleges (and where the number of schools/colleges affected is such that making individual contact locally would be impractical) the advice regarding closure will be announced by a statement through the national and local media with supporting information provided on the Department of Education and Science website.

What if the World Health Organisation declares a Level 6 pandemic?

The fact of a pandemic being declared (World Health Organization alert level 6) would not change the situation. Schools and colleges should still remain open until they are advised to close by their public health advisers.

Should schools/colleges continue to go on trips?

There is no reason why schools/colleges should not continue to go on trips both in this country and abroad. If the trip is abroad we recommend that they look at the latest available travel information and advice on the Department of Health and Children website <http://www.dohc.ie>

What should you do if a student gets sick on a trip?

If symptoms are consistent with flu and there is reason to suspect Influenza A(H1N1) i.e. it has become common in the community or the student has returned from an area affected by Influenza A (H1N1) they need:

1. To be isolated from the other students.
2. Their parents should be contacted immediately.
3. GP contacted by phone (by parent or teacher) who will do a risk assessment,
4. If GP advises that the student fits the criteria for a possible Influenza A(H1N1) case the student must remain in isolation until collected/brought home to parents.
5. If student is very ill and requires immediate medical care, the GP or hospital should be phoned PRIOR to attending.
6. If the GP advises that the student does not fit the criteria for possible Influenza A (H1N1), normal procedures for looking after a sick student on a trip should be followed.

What is the advice to parents regarding student attendance?

While schools/colleges are open parents should send their children to school/college, in the normal way, unless they have any symptoms of Influenza A(H1N1).

Can a school/college close if there are high levels of staff absenteeism?

The normal rules in relation to staff absenteeism apply to Influenza A(H1N1).

Decisions to remain open or to close having regard to the unavailability of staff due to illness in the event of an outbreak of Influenza A(H1N1), are a matter for each individual school/college authority as is the case at present where any significant number of teachers are absent due to illness or the sudden onset of severe weather. Each school/college must assess the viability of remaining open having regard to the number of staff absent/available. The position of students that may already have arrived at school/college before the position on teacher absence becomes fully known should be taken into account. This may mean in the case of a school, for example, it remains open on the day in question with the available staff carrying out a supervision role over the students where normal classroom and tuition activity is not possible.

Should schools/college invest in masks or cleaning products?

At this time, there is no requirement for schools/colleges to invest in masks or any specialised cleaning products or detergents.

Educational institutions, as far as possible, should encourage and facilitate everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like Influenza A(H1N1) including:

- Students should cover their mouth and nose with a paper tissue when coughing or sneezing. If no tissue is available they should cough or sneeze into the inside of their elbow. Students should use a tissue only once and dispose of it quickly and carefully (a dustbin is fine). This is respiratory etiquette. Waste, including used tissues, may be disposed of in the normal way. There is no need to take special precautions in the handling of such waste.
- Students should wash their hands with soap and water.
- Wash hard surfaces such as kitchen worktops, door handles, etc with a normal household cleaner as the virus can live on these surfaces.

Schools/Colleges can encourage good prevention awareness by putting up posters on respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene.

Where does responding to a flu pandemic fit in the context of wider emergency planning guidance?

Schools/colleges are reminded of the departmental advice provided in 2004 in relation to ensuring that they are included in emergency plan framework for their area. Copy of this departmental circular (PBU 04/04) is attached.

http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/pbu04_04.doc

The key agency in relation to advice on a flu pandemic is the local Department of Public Health and as advised many of the decisions regarding advice and actions to be taken will be taken locally by personnel from that office. For that reason it is important that your contact information is provided to the local Department of Public Health, if that has not been done previously.

How can schools/colleges keep up-to-date with developments?

Schools and colleges should keep themselves informed of developments regarding Influenza A(H1N1) by checking the websites provided at the end of this information sheet.

Checklist of key actions that should be taken by Schools and Colleges.

(This should not be regarded as an exhaustive list but as complimentary to existing best practices in school relating to health, safety, and hygiene and existing procedures for notifying parents and students of decisions regarding school/college closures that occur at short notice).

- Keep up to date on advice issued by the health authorities.
- The Health Service Executive has already posted information to every household in the country on the Influenza A(H1N1). Schools/colleges can supplement this information by promoting good awareness throughout the school/college community.

- Place posters on hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette up in the school/college. Updated material and posters to assist educational facilities is available at <http://www.hse.ie>
- Make staff and students (especially at 2nd level and beyond) aware of the symptoms of influenza A(H1N1).
- Make sure the school is part of the local areas emergency plan. See Departmental Circular PBU04/04.
- Update a list of key contacts in the event of a closure (and re-opening).
- Review procedures for communicating with staff and families in the event of a partial or full closure.
- Consider any arrangements that may be required for students with special needs.
- Plan, where possible, for staff absences and consider at what level a school/college may need to close where sufficient staff are not available.

Where can I get further information?

This information specific to the educational institutions will be kept updated, as further information becomes available. In the interim, further and updated information is available from a range of other websites including:

Department of Health and Children, that provides timely and regular advice and information – <http://www.dohc.ie>

The Health Protection Surveillance Centre – <http://www.hpsc.ie>

In relation to schools, the general position regarding school openings and closures is set out in department circulars 11/95, M29/95, and 107/2007, copies of which are attached.

Standard school year

http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/cl0107_2007.doc

Primary Schools

http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/PC11_95.doc

Post-Primary Schools

http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/m29_95.doc

Current at 15th June 2009.