



Circular Letter 0026/2010

To: The Boards of Management and Principals of Primary Schools

- (1) Conclusion of the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (swine flu) school vaccination programme from 31st March 2010.**
- (2) Measles, Mumps & Rubella – (MMR) vaccination.**

The Minister for Education and Science and the Department acknowledge and are grateful to school management, particularly Principals, for the work undertaken towards preventing and managing the national public health emergency, Pandemic (H1N1) 2009.

As you are aware, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is ending its Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 vaccination programme on 31 March 2010. This includes the vaccination programme of school children within the school setting. Accordingly from early April, the Department will be taking down from its website all material and documentation specific to the prevention and management of this Pandemic. However, the following websites will continue to provide useful information to schools on the prevention and management of this Pandemic virus www.swineflu.ie and www.hpsc.ie

The HSE has advised that although the vaccination programme is finishing, hand and respiratory hygiene remains an important public health issue as a means of preventing the spread of infection in schools. The attached information sheet will assist schools to promote and deliver best practice hand and respiratory hygiene standards. This sheet is available, under the *Public Health* link on the home page of the Department's website www.education.ie

Over the past few months the HSE suspended its routine MMR national schools vaccination programme in order to respond to the Pandemic (H1N1) vaccination programme. The HSE has now advised that it is resuming its MMR national schools vaccination programme of 4 to 5 year olds and that as part of this resumed vaccination programme, the HSE may be offering the MMR vaccination to all other primary students.

Arrangements for the resumption of this vaccination programme are being made locally and accordingly the HSE will be contacting your school to make the appropriate arrangements.

The Minister strongly encourages schools to continue co-operating with the HSE on this and other important public health issues.

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INFORMATION SHEET FOR SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND CENTRES OF EDUCATION ON HAND AND RESPIRATORY HYGIENE

Schools/Colleges, as far as possible, should encourage and facilitate everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs including:

Raise awareness

Schools/colleges can encourage good prevention awareness by putting up posters on respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene. Some posters are available on the website, www.hpsc.ie and select posters under the *Educational and Child care settings* link. Posters can be printed in black and white, if a colour printer is not available.

Respiratory Etiquette

Promote students and staff to 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. A tissue should be used only once and disposed of quickly and carefully (a dustbin is fine). 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.

Hand Hygiene

Students/staff should wash their hands with soap and water. Hand drying facilities must not be shared between people. Hence the type of hand drying facilities that can be used include paper towels (which are disposed of into waste bins), hot air hand dryers, roller towels, or students and staff members could be asked to bring in and use their own individual towels. Alcohol gel should only be used if soap and water is not available and will not work if hands are dirty. In the event that students are using alcohol hand gels the health authorities advise that these products should be used with caution to avoid potential risks from ingestion and eye contact. For very young children care should be taken as these gels contain at least 60% ethanol.

Routine cleaning

Wash hard surfaces such as kitchen worktops, door handles, etc with a normal household cleaner.

Plan

Schools should review and update their plans, in the event of an infectious disease incident in the school that requires a public health response. Schools/colleges should identify the arrangements to be made for looking after pupils/students showing signs of illness while waiting for parents/guardians to collect them. Schools should have in place a communications plan including contact details of parents. They should also be aware of when and how to contact their local Departments of Public Health (e.g. in the event of a cluster of cases.). Details of the nearest local Department of Public Health can be found at www.hse.ie/eng/Find_a_Service/Public_Health