

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

This information sheet gives general information about Influenza A(H1N1)v (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 advised by the Health Authorities.

What is Influenza A(H1N1)v?

Influenza A(H1N1)v is a type of influenza. It causes respiratory disease in humans, pigs and birds. The current variety of Influenza A(H1N1)v is a type that was primarily 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. The virus has now changed and can spread easily from person to person. It is called Pandemic Flu because people all over the world are being infected by it.

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

Schools/colleges should continue to operate normally unless advised by their local Department of Public Health in the Health Service Executive (HSE). Refer to <http://www.dohc.ie> or <http://www.hpsc.ie> to check for the most up to date guidance in this regard.

What are the symptoms of Influenza A(H1N1)v?

The symptoms of Influenza A(H1N1)v are similar to the symptoms of normal human, seasonal influenza and include sudden onset of fever, fatigue, coughing, sore throat, runny nose, headache and pains in the limbs or the joints. Some people with Influenza A(H1N1)v have also reported vomiting and diarrhoea. Anyone developing these symptoms is advised to stay at home. They should call the **HSE Flu Information Line Freephone 1800 94 11 00** or check www.swineflu.ie for advice on what to do next. If concerned, they should contact their GP or Out-Of-Hours GP service by telephone.

Should students who have recently returned from travel abroad, 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 call the **HSE Flu Information Line Freephone 1800 94 11 00** or check www.swineflu.ie for advice on what to do next. If concerned, they should contact their GP or Out-Of-Hours GP service by telephone.

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

If a student develops flu-like symptoms/Influenza Like Illness (ILI) at school/college, arrangements should be made for him/her to be taken home. Where the student is an adult he/she should be advised to contact the **HSE Flu Information Line Freephone 1800 94 11 00** or check www.swineflu.ie for advice on what to do next. If concerned, they should contact their GP or Out-Of-Hours GP service by telephone.

Where the student is a minor the parents should be advised as above. 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. The student should not return to school/college until 7 days from the onset of symptoms have passed.

No further action should be taken unless there is a cluster of ILI, in which case the school/college should seek advice from their local Department of Public Health of the HSE.

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

If a student is off with Influenza Like Illness (ILI), no action should be taken, other than to ensure that they do not return to school/college until 7 days from the onset of symptoms have passed. Where there is a cluster of ILI, the school/college should seek advice from the local Department of Public Health.

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

Unless the local Department of Public Health advise the management of the school to close as a precautionary measure, the school/college should remain open.

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/

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, 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.

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, if any, on the Department of Foreign Affairs website (www.dfa.ie) 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 they need:

1. To be isolated from the other students.
2. Their parents should be contacted immediately.
3. Arrangements should be made for student to return home if at all possible.
4. If not possible for student to return home, a local GP should assess. If GP advises that the student fits the criteria for a possible Influenza A(H1N1)v case the student must remain in isolation for 7 days from onset of symptoms.

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)v.

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)v.

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)v, 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 that 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. However, schools/colleges must ensure

that adequate facilities for hand washing are available and routine cleaning of facilities takes place.

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 (HSE) and as advised many of the decisions regarding advice and actions 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.

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)v 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.

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

Schools and colleges should keep themselves informed of developments regarding Influenza A(H1N1)v 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)v. 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)v.
- 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.
- Identify the arrangements to be made for looking after pupils/students showing symptoms while waiting for parents to collect them.

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>

The Health Service Executive Swine Flu website – <http://www.swineflu.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 31st July 2009.