

# INFORMATION SHEET FOR SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND CENTRES OF EDUCATION ON Pandemic (H1N1) 2009

## *Introduction*

This information sheet gives general information about Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (*which is more commonly referred to as Swine Influenza*). It also aims to answer likely questions that may arise within a school, college, or centre of education. In particular it provides public health advice on what schools and colleges can do to help prevent the spread of this pandemic influenza and what should be done if a student or staff member develops flu-like symptoms whilst at school, college or centre of education (hereafter referred to as school/college). This document is being continually updated to take account of other questions that may arise or as advised by the Health Authorities. The document is in a questions and answers format.

## *How will school/colleges know what they should be doing and how can they keep up-to-date with relevant information?*

This document aims to identify for schools and colleges information that may assist them to respond to this pandemic flu. It is possible that the information to schools and colleges will change from time to time. Schools and colleges should keep themselves informed of developments regarding Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 by checking for updates of this document on the homepage of the Department of Education website ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)) and other websites provided at the end of this information sheet. When the information changes the Department will make every effort, through electronic means, to notify schools/colleges that the information has been updated. Schools/college should however continue to monitor the Department's website for updated versions of this document.

## *What is Pandemic (H1N1) 2009?*

Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Influenza is a type of influenza virus, that causes respiratory disease. The type causing the current pandemic is caused by a new and previously unseen type. The virus appears to spread easily from person to person. It is called Pandemic Flu because people all over the world are being infected by it.

## *What are the symptoms of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009?*

The symptoms of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 have also reported vomiting and diarrhoea. Anyone developing these symptoms is advised to stay at home. They should call the 24 hour **HSE Flu Information Line Freephone 1800 94 11 00**, visit the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 section on [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) or check [www.swineflu.ie](http://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.

### *Can pandemic (H1N1) 2009 be contracted more than once?*

No, pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza cannot be contracted more than once. However, it is difficult to be certain if a child has had pandemic (H1N1) 2009 or some other infection (unless they have had a test taken by a doctor, which will not be advisable for most children). If a child has a flu-like illness they should be kept home from school for 7 days, regardless of whether they or their parent think they have already had pandemic flu.

### *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).

### *What Are the Five Most Important Things that Schools/Colleges Should Do to help reduce the spread of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 in the population?*

Schools/Colleges, as far as possible, should encourage and facilitate everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 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.swineflu.ie](http://www.swineflu.ie). You can access a full set of posters by clicking on the attached link [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie) and select *posters* under the *Educational and Child care settings* link or through the links provided on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie). 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. Please read the question below on whether there is a need to take precautions if students are using alcohol hand gels.

**Routine cleaning** - wash hard surfaces such as kitchen worktops, door handles, etc with a normal household cleaner as the virus can live on these surfaces. I would leave this in

**Recognize the symptoms and plan response** - Schools should familiarise themselves with the symptoms by checking the information available on [www.swineflu.ie](http://www.swineflu.ie) Schools should identify the arrangements to be made for looking after pupils/students showing symptoms 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](http://www.hse.ie/eng/Find_a_Service/Public_Health)  
A list of telephone numbers of local Department of Public Health offices by county is available on this Department's information page on the pandemic at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

Both children and staff should stay home and not come to school if they have any signs or symptoms of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009.

### ***Is there a need to take precautions if students are using alcohol hand gels?***

The health authorities advise that good hand hygiene can be achieved through regular handwashing with soap and water and schools should advise all students of this. 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. Note that alcohol gel should only be used if soap and water is not available and will not work if hands are dirty.

### ***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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009.

As long as students are well and not suffering from flu-like symptoms, there is no reason for students, including those who have just returned from abroad, to be kept away from school/college and they can carry on with their normal routine.

Every parent has an obligation to send a child to school. While there is no question of parents being pursued if their child was ill with Pandemic (H1N1) or where there were valid concerns due to an actual outbreak at a school, the advice of the health authorities is that parents should send their children to school where there is no symptoms of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009. The National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) is the statutory authority with responsibility for school attendance and additional information on the obligations of parents to send their child to school can be accessed on [www.newb.ie](http://www.newb.ie). Where a child is missing too much school an officer of the NEWB may visit the parents to see how they can help to make the child attend school more often.

The HSE has developed a number of one page factsheets that schools can use as a source of key information to parents of students in schools in particular:

*Advice for Parents if school is closed or children are sick and must stay at home because of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (Swine Flu)*

*Advice for Parents of Children at high risk of complications of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (Swine Flu)*

*Advice for Parents of Children with Special Needs regarding Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (Swine Flu)*

These factsheets can be accessed through the links on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie), or directly from [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie)

Further information to parents is available on the HSE website or by clicking on this link [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

### ***Does a school/college need to review any local scheme it may operate to encourage full attendance by students?***

Schools/colleges may wish to review or suspend for the duration of the pandemic any reward scheme which they promote to encourage full attendance by students throughout the academic year. This is to ensure that the operation of such schemes does not conflict with the advice of the public health authorities that students with flu like symptoms should not attend school for a seven day period after the onset of the symptoms. Students and parents should be fully advised of any suspension or amendments to any such attendance scheme which a school/college decides to take for the duration of the pandemic.

### ***What advice is available for teachers and other school staff?***

In addition to this document the HSE has produced a one page factsheet *How Teachers and other school staff can Prevent the Spread of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (Swine Flu) at School*. This is a source of key information to teachers and other staff of schools. This factsheet can be accessed through the link on the Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) or through [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie) General advice on Pandemic (H1N1) is available on [www.swineflu.ie](http://www.swineflu.ie) and [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

The normal rules in relation to staff absenteeism, including the necessity for medical certification, apply to Pandemic (H1N1) 2009. Where required under the current rules school staff absent through illness should make the necessary arrangements with their GP to obtain medical certification

### ***What advice is available for students?***

In addition to this document the HSE has produced a one page factsheet *How Students can Prevent the Spread of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (Swine Flu) at School* This is a source of key information to students. This factsheet can be accessed through the link on the Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) or through [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie) The factsheets produced by the HSE for

parents and accessible from the Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) will also be of use to students. General advice on Pandemic (H1N1) is available on [www.swineflu.ie](http://www.swineflu.ie) and [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

### ***What advice is available for those dealing with students with special needs?***

The HSE has produced a one page factsheet *Advice for Parents of Children with Special Needs regarding Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (Swine Flu)* and a leaflet [Information and medical advice about Pandemic \(H1N1\) 2009 Influenza for people with specific medical conditions](#). The HSE have also produced a number of leaflets for those with specific medical conditions such as Cystic Fibrosis and these may be accessed through [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

The HSE has also produced two sets of guidelines for schools and colleges with children with disabilities, which can be accessed by clicking on the following links or through [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie) - *Guidelines for residential units for children and adults with a disability* and *Guidance for special schools/special classes – students with disabilities*

All the above documents are sources of key information for those dealing with students with special needs and can be accessed through the link on the Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) or through [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie)

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

If a student/staff member develops flu-like symptoms/Influenza Like Illness (ILI) at school/college, arrangements should be made for him/her to be taken home. Where they are an adult he/she should be advised to contact the 24 hour **HSE Flu Information Line Freephone 1800 94 11 00** or check [www.swineflu.ie](http://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. Subject to individual GP advice it is most likely that the student/staff member should not return to school/college until 7 days from the onset of symptoms have passed.

The school/college should have a plan for communicating with other parents and staff members in the event that a student/staff member develops flu-like symptoms. The school/college may wish to advise parents and guardians of where they can obtain information on the Pandemic (H1N1) through websites like [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie) or through the links provided on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie). and the need for vigilance in case they themselves or other family members develop flu-like symptoms.

Schools/colleges do not have to take any further action unless the management is concerned that an unusually high number of children are presenting with flu like symptoms or Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 in the school in which case the school/college should seek advice from their local Department of Public Health of the HSE.

### ***How should a school/college deals with queries from the media?***

Schools/Colleges may wish to plan in advance on how they will deal with queries from the media should an incident of the Pandemic occur in their school/college. In the event of media interest the requirements for confidentiality may need to be borne in mind. Where the school/college is working with the local Public Health office it may wish to confer with that office prior to responding to any enquiry from the media.

### ***What advice is there for students and staff who are pregnant or who have an underling medical condition, such as asthma?***

At this time all students and staff should attend school, including those with specific medical conditions and those who are pregnant. However those who are in a high risk group (with underlying medical conditions) should speak with their GP as soon as possible if they develop symptoms of flu-like illness. People at high risk of flu complications who develop flu can benefit from early treatment with antivirals.

The following documents provide detailed information for people with medical conditions and women who are pregnant and are available at [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie)

1. [Information and medical advice about Pandemic \(H1N1\) 2009 Influenza for people with specific medical conditions](#)
2. [Information and medical advice about influenza A\(H1N1\) for pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding](#)

### ***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. There is not likely to be any requirement to close individual classrooms or schools if one student who had attended the school/college becomes ill with Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 or ILI. However where the management feels that there are an unusually high number of cases of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009, 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/](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 partially or fully, on foot of public health 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.

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

The normal rules in relation to staff absenteeism apply to Pandemic (H1N1) 2009. Decisions to remain open or to close having regard to the unavailability of staff due to illness in the event of an outbreak of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009, 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 Students/Staff who are well and do not have flu like symptoms but whose family members currently have Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 stay away from school?***

**No.** As long as they are well and not suffering from flu-like symptoms, there is no reason for these students or staff to stay 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 24 Hour **HSE Flu Information Line Freephone 1800 94 11 00** or check [www.swineflu.ie](http://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/staff 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 or staff 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 24 Hour **HSE Flu Information Line Freephone 1800 94 11 00** or check [www.swineflu.ie](http://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 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.

***Will Schools/Colleges be needed by the Health Service Executive as locations for Mass Vaccination Clinics for the general public?***

At this point in time, it is highly unlikely that school/college facilities will be required by the HSE, as locations for mass vaccination clinics for the general public. Hence the vaccination of the population against this virus should not impact on the normal operations of school/college life. It is possible in isolated places that the HSE may need to use the facilities of schools/colleges. Should this arise the HSE will make contact with schools/colleges at a local level. The vaccination of students is planned for later and the HSE will be advising of the arrangements for this in due course.

***What specific advice is there for the Third level Sector?***

The HSE has made recommendations which are designed to accompany the National Pandemic Influenza Plan, 2007 ([http://www.dohc.ie/publications/National\\_flu\\_plan.html](http://www.dohc.ie/publications/National_flu_plan.html) ) and university /college emergency plans already in place. They are subject to change based on ongoing surveillance and continuous risk assessment. These recommendations can be accessed through the Department of education website or by clicking on the link [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie).

The HSE have also produced guidance for third level institutions on managing ill students and this can be accessed by clicking on *Guidance for third level institutions: Management of ill students* or through [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie)

### ***Should schools/colleges participate in inter-school competitions or visits?***

**Yes** schools/colleges should continue to participate in inter-school competitions and visits **unless** they have received advice from their local Public Health office to curtail such visits for a period of time.

In advance of a visit to a school/college the visiting school should check out the situation as to whether any special circumstances may apply in the school they are due to visit.

If an incident of the Pandemic arises in a school/college that has recently received a visit from another school/college then that the other school/college should be advised of this.

### ***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](http://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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 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 pandemic (H1N1) 2009 normal procedures for looking after a sick student on a trip should be followed.

### ***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](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 a Leaving or Junior Certificate examination is diagnosed with Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 the SEC should be contacted in the normal way with any medical advice made available to the school.

### **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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009. 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 2<sup>nd</sup> level and beyond) aware of the symptoms of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009.
- 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/ci0107\\_2007.doc](http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/ci0107_2007.doc)

Primary Schools

[http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/PC11\\_95.doc](http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/PC11_95.doc)

Post-Primary Schools

[http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/m29\\_95.doc](http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/m29_95.doc)

Information current as at 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009