

July 30th 2009

V1.0

Frequently asked questions: Influenza A (H1N1)v (Swine Flu) information for parents

The following advice is for parents of children in all educational institutions, including crèches, childcare, summer camps, schools and third level institutions. Unless otherwise mentioned 'educational institution' applies to all of the above.

What is Influenza A (H1N1)v?

Influenza A (H1N1) is a type of flu virus. In the past this virus affected pigs, and only occasionally affected people who had close contact with pigs. 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 Influenza A (H1N1)v dangerous?

Most people infected with this virus have a mild to moderate illness, but some have more severe illness.

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

In most children, the symptoms of Influenza A (H1N1)v are similar to the symptoms of regular flu. They include:

- Temperature over 38 °C/100.4 °F that begins suddenly **and** some of the following:
 - Dry cough
 - Sore throat
 - Muscle aches and pains
 - Headache
 - Runny nose
 - Severe weakness and fatigue
 - Vomiting/diarrhoea (in some cases)

What are the differences between influenza A (H1N1)v and the common cold?

It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between the common cold and flu.

The main difference is that the symptoms of influenza come on rapidly and are typically accompanied by muscle aches and a fever. The common cold has a more gradual onset and is associated with a runny nose and sneezing.

For a full list of differences between influenza A(H1N1) and the common cold, please see table below.

| Symptoms | Influenza A(H1N1)v | Common Cold |
|-------------------------|--|-------------|
| Onset | Sudden | Slow |
| Fever | Characteristically High (≥38°C or 100°F) | Rare |
| Headache | Prominent | Rare |
| General aches and pains | Usual, often severe | Rare |

| Symptoms | Influenza A(H1N1)v | Common Cold |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Fatigue, weakness | Can be prolonged for a number of weeks | Quite mild |
| Extreme exhaustion | Early and prominent | Never |
| Runny nose | Common | Common |
| Sneezing | Common | Usual |
| Sore throat | Common | Common |
| Cough | Common, can be severe | Mild to moderate, hacking cough |
| Diarrhoea, vomiting | Sometimes | Not associated with the common cold in adults |

How does Influenza A (H1N1)v spread?

Flu virus spreads from person to person mainly through the coughing or sneezing of a sick person. Flu virus may also be spread when a person touches something (for example a tissue or door handle touched by the infected person) that is contaminated with the virus and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. This virus is not transmitted by eating pork or pork products.

What should I do as a parent?

Two important actions to protect my family

1. Be aware of the symptoms of flu-like illness and know where to seek medical care. If you think you or your child may have Influenza A

(H1N1)v you should call the **HSE Flu Information Line Freephone 1800 94 11 00** or check www.swineflu.ie for advice on what to do next. Remember to ring your GP first if you wish to seek medical advice. Do not visit the surgery unannounced.

2. Teach your children the following **good health habits** to help stop spread of germs:

- Teach your children 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. Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.
- Teach your children to use a tissue only once and dispose of it quickly and carefully (a dustbin is fine).
- Teach your children to wash their hands frequently with soap and water. Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.
- Teach your children to stay at least 1 metre/3 feet away from people who are sick.
- Children who are sick should always stay home from the educational institution. If they have Influenza A (H1N1)v they should stay away from the educational institution for 7 days from the onset of symptoms.
- In communities where Influenza A (H1N1)v has occurred, avoid large crowds of people whenever possible.

- Wash hard surfaces such as kitchen worktops, door handles, etc with a normal household cleaner as the virus can live on these surfaces.

What should I do if my child gets sick?

If your child gets sick with a flu-like illness as described above you should:

- Keep your child at home and away from others as much as is possible to avoid spreading infection to others. If they are sick with flu they should stay home for 7 days from the onset of symptoms.
- Give your child simple anti-fever medication such as paracetamol or ibuprofen (NB aspirin should NOT be given to children under 16 years of age) and drink plenty of fluids.
- If you think you or your child may have Influenza A (H1N1)v you 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 you think your child needs to see the GP, remember to ring your GP first. Do not visit the surgery unannounced.
- You should teach your child good health habits, as above.
- It is important to ensure that all household surfaces that are touched by hands are kept clean, especially bedside tables, surfaces in bathrooms and kitchens and children's toys. Such surfaces should be wiped regularly with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.

Should I send my child to their educational institution?

Yes, while educational institutions are open parents should send their children to the educational institution unless they have any symptoms. It is expected that educational institutions will remain open even if there are some children out sick with Influenza A (H1N1)v. However in certain circumstances an educational institution may be advised to close. This decision will be made in the light of expert advice from the local Department of Public Health who will always have the interests of pupils in mind. We urge parents not to withdraw their children unless given this advice.

Should I send my child to summer camp / Irish College / Language College?

Yes, if the summer camp is open and your child has been well for the past 7 days there is no reason not to send them. However, you should ensure that you will be able to take your child home from the camp if they get sick or should you be advised that students are to go home on public health grounds.

If a child's educational institution is closed what should I do?

You will have to make other arrangements for looking after your children. These alternative arrangements should aim to have as few as possible

children being cared for together in any setting. If an educational institution is closed due to Influenza A (H1N1)v it is important that gatherings of those children outside of the educational institution do not occur.

Isn't it better for my child to catch this now to develop some immunity in case this comes back more seriously?

Children who have been infected with Influenza A (H1N1)v have generally recovered without complications but some children have had a severe illness. It is preferable to avoid exposure to the virus if possible. When a vaccine is available this will provide safe immunity for children.

What happens when a child in an educational institution is identified as a case of Influenza A (H1N1)v?

If a student develops flu-like symptoms at their educational institution, arrangements should be made for him/her to be taken home. The student should not return to their educational institution until 7 days from the onset of symptoms have passed.

In relation to other students no further action needs to be taken. Parents and teachers should, however, be vigilant for the symptoms of flu and, at the first signs of these, the child should stay at home and parents should call the **HSE**

Flu Information Line Freephone 1800 94 11 00 or check www.swineflu.ie for advice on what to do next.

Why would an educational institution stay open if there are children with Influenza A (H1N1)v?

Educational institution closures and the distribution of antiviral medicines for prevention are not recommended at this time because the virus is widespread within the community. People are likely to be repeatedly exposed to the virus in their everyday lives - closing an educational institution will no longer be effective in slowing the spread of the virus as people could still be exposed outside the educational institution.

In some special circumstances – for example, an educational institution with children who are particularly vulnerable to infection – then educational institution closures might still be recommended.

Should students who have recently returned from travel abroad, be kept away from educational institutions?

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 their educational institution and they can carry on with their normal routine. Parents 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.

Should educational institutions continue to go on trips?

There is no reason why educational institution 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>

Should educational institutions be doing anything to prevent the spread of Influenza A(H1N1)v?

Yes, like parents, educational institutions should encourage and facilitate everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like Influenza A (H1N1)v including:

- Children should cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If no tissue is available they should cough or sneeze into the inside of their elbow. Children should use a tissue only once and dispose of it quickly and carefully (a bin is fine). This is known as respiratory etiquette.
- Children should wash their hands frequently 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

Educational institutions could put up posters on respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene and ensure that children have access to suitable hand washing facilities. Posters can be found on www.hpsc.ie – educational and childcare settings.

Should educational institutions continue to run extracurricular or sporting activities?

Yes, educational institutions should continue extracurricular activities as normal. If a class/educational institution is advised to close due to Influenza A (H1N1), any extracurricular activities that the class/educational institution would normally do should also cease.

Is there a vaccine against human influenza A(H1N1)v ?

A vaccine is an injection which prevents a person getting a particular disease. It works by strengthening the body's immune system. The protection provided by a vaccine is long lasting. The vaccine must be given before the person is infected with the disease.

Vaccine companies are manufacturing a vaccine for Influenza A (H1N1)v. The Health Service will provide the vaccine to everyone in the country as

soon as sufficient amount of vaccines are available. This may commence as early as autumn but it will take many months to vaccinate all people.

Is the seasonal flu vaccine effective against influenza A (H1N1)v?

The current seasonal flu vaccine provides little or no protection against the influenza A (H1N1)v virus. However, anyone recommended to get seasonal flu vaccine should get it this year, as well as the Influenza A (H1N1)v vaccine.

Are there medicines to treat influenza A (H1N1)v?

Yes, antiviral medicines are medicines used to treat infections with viruses.

They can help lessen the symptoms of the illness. These medicines work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of onset of symptoms).

They only provide protection while the person is taking them. Like antibiotics it is very important to follow your doctor's advice and complete the course prescribed.

There are two anti-viral drugs, which can be used in people with Influenza A (H1N1)v infection – oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®).

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) has recommended that during the pandemic:

Tamiflu can be used in children younger than one year of age.

Tamiflu and Relenza can be used in women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Where to find more information

The most accurate public information on the current situation can be found here:

www.hse.ie

www.hpsc.ie

www.dohc.ie

www.dfa.ie