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Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

TO: All Principals of Secondary Schools, Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, West Cavan
FROM: Dr. Peter J Wright, Director of Public Health
DATE: 17th August 2009
RE: Preparation for [H1N1] 2009 Influenza (Swine Flu)

Further to previous correspondence of 30th July 2009.

The HSE guidance document for Third Level Institutions in preparing for Pandemic [H1N1] 2009 (Swine Flu) has been updated, and I enclose this for your attention.

Frequently Asked Questions [FAQs] detailing advice for parents of children in all educational institutions has likewise been updated, and I enclose this for your attention also.

Advice / information on how to minimise the impact of swine flu on schools and other educational facilities is currently being developed and is not yet available.

Please note that Guidelines are subject to change, based on ongoing surveillance and continuous risk assessment, and latest information can be accessed via the following web sites:

- Health Protection Surveillance Centre www.hpse.ie – Educational and Childcare Settings
- Health Service Executive www.swineflu.ie – Educational and Childcare Information

Yours sincerely

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Dr. Peter J. Wright MB, BCh, BAO, FFPHMI
Director of Public Health

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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.dohe.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/services/observat/ah/04_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.

Frequently asked questions: Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (Swine Flu) information for parents

13th August 2009

Version 1.2

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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009?

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. This Influenza A (H1N1) is now called Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 because people all over the world are being infected by it.

Is Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 dangerous?

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

What are the symptoms of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza?

In most children, the symptoms of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza 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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 and the common cold, please see table below.

Symptoms	Pandemic (H1N1) 2009	Common Cold
Onset	Sudden	Slow
Fever	Characteristically High ($\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$ or 100°F)	Rare
Headache	Prominent	Rare
General aches and pains	Usual, often severe	Rare
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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 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 that is contaminated with the virus (for example a tissue or door handle touched by the infected person) 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 your family

1. Be aware of the symptoms of flu-like illness and know where to seek medical care. See below.
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. If they do not have access to hand washing facilities give them alcohol hand gel to use frequently.
 - Teach your children to avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth.
 - 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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza they should stay away from the educational institution for 7 days from the onset of symptoms.
 - Wash hard surfaces such as kitchen worktops, door handles, etc with a normal household cleaner as the virus can live on these surfaces. Do this frequently.

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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 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 because they have severe symptoms, remember to ring your GP first. Do not visit the surgery unannounced.
- If your child is in a high risk group for complications of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 flu contact your GP, even if their symptoms are mild (High

risk group is people with: chronic lung, heart, kidney, liver, or neurological disease; immunosuppression (whether caused by disease or treatment); diabetes mellitus; people aged 65 years and older; children <5 years (children <2 years are at higher risk severe complications); people on medication for asthma, severely obese people (BMI ≥ 40), pregnant women and people with haemoglobinopathies)

- 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 there unless they have any symptoms. It is expected that educational institutions will remain open even if there are some children out sick with Pandemic (H1N1) 2009. 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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 it is important, where possible, 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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza?

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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza?

Educational institution closures and the distribution of antiviral medicines for prevention are not recommended at this time because the virus is spreading in the community generally. 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 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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza?

Yes, like parents, educational institutions should encourage and facilitate everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 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. Where soap and water is not readily available alcohol based hand rub can be used.
- Children should avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth.
- Wash hard surfaces such as kitchen worktops, door handles, etc frequently 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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009, any extracurricular activities that the class/educational institution would normally do should also cease.

Is there a vaccine against human Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza?

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

Vaccine companies are manufacturing a vaccine for Pandemic (H1N1) 2009. The Health Service Executive 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 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009?

The current seasonal flu vaccine provides little or no protection against the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus. However, anyone recommended to get seasonal flu vaccine should get it this year, as well as the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 vaccine.

Are there medicines to treat Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza?

Yes, there are medicines known as anti-virals that can be used to treat flu due to Pandemic (H1N1) 2009. However, as most cases of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza will be mild, anti-viral treatment will only be necessary in a small proportion of cases. Doctors will assess each case but the following groups are the ones most likely to require treatment with anti-virals:

- Patients who appear to have severe symptoms or
- Patients who are in defined high risk groups

Where to find more information

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

www.swineflu.ie
www.hse.ie
www.hpsc.ie
www.dohc.ie
www.dfa.ie