

How teachers and other school staff can prevent the spread of influenza (flu) at school

Seasonal influenza 2010-2011

Version 1.0

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Background

Schools play a critical role in protecting the health of their students, staff, and the community from contagious diseases, such as influenza. We are now experiencing our annual flu season and, as had been expected, this year the predominant flu virus is the H1N1 virus also known as swine flu. We are now seeing a major rise in people attending GPs and GP out-of-hours services with flu-like illnesses.

Be aware of the symptoms of flu

Flu usually presents with sudden onset of fever (temperature over 38° C) and cough or sore throat. Other symptoms can include runny or stuffy nose, limb or joint pains, headache, vomiting or diarrhoea.

Prevent spread of flu by doing the following at all times:

1. Practice good hand hygiene by washing your hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Hand drying facilities at school must not be shared between people with the exception of electric hand dryers and roller towels (of the type that allows for a clean section to be pulled out for each use). Staff and students may be asked to bring in and use their own individual towels.
2. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of tissues immediately as household rubbish in the normal way. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow or shoulder, not into your hands.
3. If you have suspected flu, you should remain at home for 7 days from when symptoms began.
4. If you are at higher risk for complications from flu, get the seasonal flu vaccine (see Box 1).

Teachers and other school staff should take the following steps ALL the time and not only during the flu season to help prevent students and themselves from getting sick with respiratory illnesses.

- Ensure posters and signage regarding flu, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette are appropriately displayed in the school (see links to posters below).
- Remind students to practice good hand hygiene and ensure that they have the time and facilities to wash their hands as often as necessary. Younger children and those with special needs may require extra attention.
- Be a good role model by practicing good hand hygiene and covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Do not permit children to share wind instruments. Avoid sharing pens, crayons, pencils, toys/objects where possible and if sharing them clean them before passing them between students.
- Ensure regular cleaning of surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact such as desks, door knobs and keyboards with usual cleaning agents.
- Keep an eye out for students with symptoms of flu and arrange for them to go home as soon as possible. If practicable they should be sent to another room while awaiting collection.
- Staff should also stay at home if they have symptoms of flu.
- Persons who are in high risk groups for complications of flu (see Box 1) and who develop flu symptoms should speak with their doctor, as people at high risk of complications can benefit from early treatment with antiviral medicines.

Box 1 Persons who may be at higher risk for complications of flu

Persons who may be at higher risk for complications of flu include:

- persons with chronic respiratory, heart, kidney, liver or neurological disease, immunosuppression (whether caused by disease or treatment), diabetes, haemoglobinopathies
- people aged 65 years and older
- children under the age of 2 years
- people on medication for asthma
- those who are severely obese
- pregnant women

Further information

Posters:

<http://www.ndsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/Gastroenteric/Handwashing/Posters/>

[http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-](http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/Respiratory/Influenza/SeasonalInfluenza/Infectioncontroladvice/File,3599,en.pdf)

[Z/Respiratory/Influenza/SeasonalInfluenza/Infectioncontroladvice/File,3599,en.pdf](http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/Respiratory/Influenza/SeasonalInfluenza/Infectioncontroladvice/File,3599,en.pdf)

Guidance on seasonal influenza:

<http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/Respiratory/Influenza/SeasonalInfluenza/>

Contact details for HSE Departments of Public Health (and counties they cover)

HSE North West Tel 071-9852900 Donegal Leitrim Sligo	HSE Midlands Tel 057-9359891 Longford Westmeath Offaly Laois
HSE South Tel 021-4927601 Cork Kerry	HSE Mid West Tel 061-483338 Clare Limerick Tipperary North
HSE North East Tel 046-9076412 Cavan Monaghan Louth Meath	HSE South East Tel 056-7784124 Tipperary South Waterford Kilkenny Carlow Wexford
HSE East Tel 01 - 6352145 or 01-6352178 Kildare Dublin Wicklow	HSE West Tel 091-775 200 Mayo Roscommon Galway