

## **H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Flu)**

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**25 May 2009**

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**1. What is seasonal flu?**

The influenza virus circulates every year and causes an infectious disease known as influenza (flu). Symptoms of flu include: sudden fever, headache, muscle aches and pains, fatigue, cough, sore throat, stuffy or runny nose. The virus can cause a mild or severe illness depending on the type of influenza virus and the age and general health of the affected person. Older people, young children and people with certain illnesses or chronic medical conditions are at higher risk for serious flu complications.

**2. What is swine flu?**

Swine flu viruses are contagious respiratory diseases usually found in pigs. Various flu viruses can infect pigs but the most common is the H1N1 subtype. A new strain of H1N1 swine flu that affects humans was recently identified.

**3. Will the seasonal flu vaccination protect against H1N1 Influenza (Human Swine Flu)?**

The Department of Human Services has advised it is not expected the Australian seasonal influenza vaccine will provide protection against this new strain of influenza virus. However, people over 65 and those who are vulnerable are encouraged to be vaccinated as this will at least provide protection against seasonal influenza.

**4. How can I protect myself and my family against catching either seasonal or H1N1 Influenza (Human Swine Flu)?**

Good health hygiene practices can greatly reduce the chance you will get the flu or pass it on to others.

- Maintain good health - keeping yourself healthy helps your body defend itself against viruses that make you ill.
- Try to stay one metre or more from sick people to reduce the spread of illness.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Throw the tissue in a plastic-lined rubbish bin after you use it.
- Wash your hands regularly, especially after you cough or sneeze. It is best to wash hands with soap and warm water, scrubbing wrists, palms, fingers and nails for 10-15 seconds. Rinse your hands and dry them well with disposable paper towel or an automatic hand dryer. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.

It can be challenging to teach very young children cough etiquette and other hygiene measures. Explaining to children that it is important to keep away germs provides a base to engage them in cough etiquette and hand washing. For younger children, pictures showing what to do can be helpful, as can strategies that make this into a ritual game or fun.

Discourage children from sharing eating utensils, food or drinks. Extra diligent cleaning of toys and surfaces in areas frequented by young children may be appropriate.

**5. What should I do if I or my family have the flu?**

If you have or suspect you have the flu you should call your doctor (GP). You should avoid public places and close contact with others, especially children.

Don't visit people who have the flu unless it is absolutely necessary. If a member of your family has the flu, keep their personal items, such as towels, separate from the rest of the family.

Concerns about swine flu should be referred to any of the following:

- **The Swine Influenza Hotline Tel. 180 2007** – for the general public and people returning from the US, Canada, Mexico, Panama or Japan with flu-like symptoms
- **Nurse-on-Call Tel. 1300 606 024** – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- **Your doctor (GP)** – if you have an influenza-like illness (fever, cough and fatigue) and have travelled to Mexico, Panama, the United States, Canada or Japan in the past seven days.

**6. My child has a runny nose, but no fever or cough. Should I take them to a doctor?**

If you are concerned and are unsure what to do:

- **Contact your doctor (GP)**
- **Call Nurse-on-Call Tel. 1300 606 024** – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)

**7. Can I send my child to child care, kinder or school?**

As with all influenzas, it is appropriate to keep your child home if they are unwell. For the latest advice on who should remain home and for how long:

- **Contact your doctor (GP)**
- **Call Nurse-on-Call Tel. 1300 606 024** – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)

**8. My child is not sick. Should I continue to allow my child to attend normal events and activities, such as school camps, sports days, and excursions?**

If you have no reason to believe your child is sick, there is no need to change planned activities or avoid going to public places or events.

Standard good general health practices should continue to be practiced, including coughing and sneezing into a disposable tissue and disposing of it appropriately, washing hands afterwards, avoiding close contact with people who appear unwell, getting adequate sleep, eating nutritious food and keeping physically healthy.

If you or your child is unwell, you should seek medical attention and avoid public places and close contact with others.

**9. My child has just returned from overseas. Can my child return to school?**

On 25 May 2009, the Victorian Government asked that all children returning from the US, Canada, Japan, Mexico and Panama be kept at home for seven (7) days prior to returning to school. For the latest advice on affected countries and whether your child should remain home upon return to Australia, refer to the contacts listed in response to question 5 above.

**10. Who makes the decision to place a person into quarantine or close a school?**

The Department of Human Services is responsible for determining the need for quarantine.

The decision to close a Catholic school will be made locally by the school's authorities. The CECV strongly recommends to all Catholic schools that decisions in relation to school closure and quarantine be made in accordance with the advice of the Department of Human Services.

**11. How will parents be informed of a school closure? What happens if the decision is made out of school hours (say at night or over a weekend)?**

At a minimum, the school principal (or delegate) will formally advise parents in writing. Wherever possible, they will also hold a face-to-face meeting. If parents need to be advised of decisions made out of school hours, parents will be advised by telephone, where possible. It is important that you update your school with any changes to your contact details.

**12. Who can I talk to if my family or my child needs counselling support?**

In the first instance, parents are encouraged to contact their school principal to discuss any counselling needs. Assistance in this area is also provided by your Diocesan Catholic Education Office.

**13. Where can I get up-to-date information?**

Visit the [Victorian Government Health Information Web site](http://www.health.vic.gov.au) (www.health.vic.gov.au) for up-to-date information for schools, children, parents and the community.

Concerns about swine flu should be referred to any of the following:

- **The Swine Influenza Hotline Tel. 180 2007** – for the general public and people returning from the Americas or Japan with flu-like symptoms
- **Nurse-on-Call Tel. 1300 606 024** – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- **Your doctor (GP)** – if you have an influenza-like illness (fever, cough and fatigue) and have travelled to the US, Mexico, Canada, Japan or Panama in the past seven days.
- **Your local hospital** – if you have pneumonia and have travelled to the US, Canada, Mexico, Japan or Panama in the past seven days.