

Pandemic H1N1 Advice for Parents & Guardians

What is Pandemic H1N1?

Pandemic H1N1 is a type of flu virus, which can spread easily from person to person. It is called a pandemic flu because people all over the world are being infected by it.

Most people infected with this virus have a mild to moderate illness, but some have more severe illness, in particular those in high risk groups or with underlying medical conditions.

What are the Symptoms of Pandemic H1N1?

Having the symptoms listed below does not always mean that you have this flu. Many different illnesses cause similar symptoms. The symptoms are like those of normal seasonal flu and include: fever that begins very suddenly, severe fatigue, a cough, a sore throat, a runny nose, headache and muscle aches. Some people have vomiting and diarrhoea. Most individuals recover from this virus without the use of anti-viral drugs or the need for hospitalisation. While it is usually a mild disease some people may develop complications such as pneumonia.

What are the differences between Pandemic H1N1 and the common cold?

Some people mistake a common cold for influenza/flu. 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.

The table below may be useful in distinguishing between the two.

| Symptoms | Pandemic H1N1 | 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 |

What is the course of Pandemic H1N1?

It appears that after a person becomes infected, it takes less than two days for symptoms to start and this is when people are most infectious. After the onset of symptoms, the illness is

contagious for a further 5 days. For this reason you should stay away from AIT for 7 days from the onset of symptoms.

How does Pandemic H1N1 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.

Who are those considered to be in a high risk group and will need treatment?

People who are in high risk groups will need immediate treatment upon development of symptoms. These include people who have: chronic lung, heart, kidney, liver, or neurological disease; people whose immune system is reduced by disease or medications; people with diabetes mellitus; people aged 65 years and older; children under 5 (children under 2 are at particular risk of influenza); people on medication for asthma, severely obese people (body mass index more than 40) and pregnant women.

If you or a close family member are in one of these high risk groups and you suspect that you have influenza or have been in close contact with someone you suspect has influenza then contact your GP by telephone immediately.

Who will receive anti-viral treatment?

As most cases of Pandemic H1N1 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.
- Patients who are in defined high risk groups.
- Should a GP prescribe anti-viral treatment the prescription can be filled at any pharmacy. Anti-viral medicines for this flu are free of charge to all.

Is there a vaccine against Pandemic H1N1?

Vaccine companies are manufacturing a vaccine for Pandemic H1N1. The HSE will provide the vaccine as soon as sufficient amount of vaccines are available. No date has yet been confirmed for the delivery or distribution of this vaccine.

What should I do as a parent/guardian?

1. Be aware of the symptoms of flu-like illness and know where to seek medical care. If you think you or your son/daughter may have Pandemic H1N1 you should call the HSE Flu Information Line free phone 1800 94 11 00 or check www.hpsc.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 son/daughter the following good health habits to help stop spread of germs:
 - Avoiding close contact with people who appear unwell and have fever and cough.
 - Always carrying tissues.
 - Covering your nose and mouth with disposable tissues when sneezing, coughing, wiping and blowing your nose.
 - Always disposing of used tissues into a bin immediately.

- Washing your hands thoroughly with soap and water or alcohol-based hand cleaners regularly.
- Cleaning surfaces regularly to get rid of germs. 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. Such surfaces should be wiped regularly with a household disinfectant.
- If your son/daughter is sharing accommodation with an infected person advise them to try where possible to minimise contact with the infected person e.g. prepare and eat meals separately and avoid sharing bedrooms during the 7 day period.

Your son/daughter should not travel or come to college for any reason if they are showing any influenza symptoms.

What should I do if my son/daughter gets sick?

As per the current HSE guidelines it is anticipated that most people with this flu will not require anti-viral medication. If your son/daughter is ill, follow the HSE guidelines:

- If your son/daughter is ill and is living away from home make arrangements for them to return home.
- If you think your son/daughter may have Pandemic H1N1 you should call the HSE Flu Information Line free phone 1800 94 11 00 or check www.hpsc.ie for advice on what to do next.
- Phone your GP for advice; do not visit the surgery unannounced.
- Your son/daughter should stay at home for 7 days – avoid spreading infection to others.
- Hands should be washed regularly with soap and water, and especially after coughing and sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- They should take simple anti-fever medication such as paracetamol and drink plenty of fluids.
- Avoid smoking.
- Discourage visitors.
- 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. Such surfaces should be wiped regularly with a household disinfectant.

Should I send my son/daughter to AIT?

Yes, parents should ensure students come to college, unless they have any symptoms. It is expected that AIT will remain open even if there are some students out sick with Pandemic H1N1.

If AIT is closed, what should I do?

Students are advised to attend college as normal. In certain circumstances AIT may be advised to close. This decision will be made in the light of expert advice from the local public health officials. If AIT is closed due to Pandemic H1N1, you should make arrangements to bring your son/daughter home.

What happens if my son/daughter in AIT is identified as a case of Pandemic H1N1?

If a student develops flu-like symptoms at AIT arrangements should be made for him/her to be taken home. The student should not return to AIT until 7 days from the onset of symptoms have passed. Parents should, however, be vigilant for the symptoms of flu and, at the first signs of these, your son/daughter should stay at home and parents should call the HSE Flu

Information Line free phone 1800 94 11 00 or check www.hpsc.ie for advice on what to do next. If you need medical advice you should contact your GP by phone.

Should students who have recently returned from travel abroad, come to college?

Yes, as long as they are well and not suffering from flu-like symptoms, there is no reason for them to stay away from AIT and the student can carry on with your normal routine. They should, however, be vigilant for the symptoms of this flu and, at the first signs of these, should stay at home and call the HSE Flu Information Line free phone 1800 94 11 00. If concerned, or are in a high risk group they should contact their GP by phone.

Further information:

Health Protection Surveillance Centre: www.hpsc.ie

Health Service Executive: www.hse.ie