

Pandemic H1N1 Advice for Staff

AIT is following best practice in relation to Pandemic H1N1, as detailed by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre and the HSE. The institute has established a committee to develop plans and formulate a response to the risk posed to staff and students at the institute by this pandemic. This document sets out the appropriate approach for staff to follow in the event of becoming infected with H1N1 and seeks to answer questions which people may have.

The key points are:

- Don't panic, for the vast majority of people this is a mild illness.
- If you suspect you have this flu do not come to AIT for any reason.
- Stay at home for 7 days after you first develop symptoms.
- Call the HSE Flu Information Line free phone number 1800 94 11 00.
- Ring your GP for further advice in particular if you are in a high risk group. Do not attend the surgery without ringing your GP first.
- Inform your department or functional office as soon as possible regarding your condition.

Any staff members who have come in contact with those with this flu are advised to carry on as normal while monitoring themselves for symptoms. Those in high risk groups (have diabetes, chronic respiratory, heart, neurological disease, immune-suppressed, aged 65 or older, are on medication for asthma, obese or pregnant) are asked to contact their GP for advice.

Should I attend work as normal?

Yes, except if you have any flu 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 should I do if a member of my family develops H1N1?

You should come to work as normal except if you have any of these flu symptoms. If you are in the high risk group (as listed above) you should contact your GP by phone for advice. Do not visit the surgery without phoning your GP first.

What will happen if a member of my family/dependents are ill and need me to take care of them?

You should contact your line manager and arrange to take leave in the first instance. Force majeure leave is available as a first option. This is emergency leave that a staff member can take – three days paid leave in any 12 consecutive months or 5 days in any 36 consecutive months. Absence for part of a day is counted as one day for force majeure leave. After the force majeure leave entitlement is used, staff will be expected to take unpaid leave or annual leave as appropriate. Staff are advised to contact the HR Office where the taking of annual leave is not an option to explore other alternatives.

What procedures will apply (such as sickness absence)?

Normal day-to-day sick leave arrangements will apply. If you are unwell, you should telephone your department or functional office and advise them. They will record if you are feeling unwell due to symptoms of Pandemic H1N1, which information will then be collated centrally. You should follow the guidelines as per AIT’s website for further information on what to do should you get this flu.

What are the sick pay arrangements?

The normal sick pay arrangements will apply. A sick note from your GP is required from the third day of illness and although you should not visit the GP’s surgery yourself, you should make arrangements for a third party to collect it for you. You should then furnish the institute with the sick note at your earliest convenience.

Will annual leave arrangements be affected?

If a member of staff is diagnosed with Pandemic H1N1 while on leave, they will be classed as being on sick leave and the normal arrangements will apply. If a staff member has to look after a family member who has the virus, then force majeure will apply firstly then when that entitlement is used, the staff member will be expected to avail of annual leave and/or other leave as appropriate.

The limits that are usually imposed on the number of days that can be carried over at the end of the annual leave year may be relaxed in the case where Pandemic H1N1 is the reason why annual leave could not be taken.

What will happen if I fail to turn up for work for fear of catching Pandemic H1N1?

This is not a justifiable reason for not turning up for work and failure to attend to work will be dealt with under the institute’s disciplinary procedure as with any unauthorised absence.

As a Head of School, Department, Function Manager or Contact Nominee, what are your responsibilities when a staff member contacts you about a potential infection?

If you are contacted you will need to ascertain if the staff member has contacted their GP. You will need to record the staff member's details – name, date of absence and date of possible return to work – and then inform the HR Office so it can be centrally collated. This shall allow the team to monitor the incidence of infection within AIT to seek advice from Public Health as required.

What are my responsibilities as a staff member?

- Follow guidelines as laid down by AIT, HSE and Department of Health and Children.
- If you have been in contact with someone who has the H1N1 symptoms, continue to turn up for work unless you yourself develop symptoms.
- Contact your GP by phone if you develop symptoms.
- If you have symptoms do not come to work; advise your manager by phone.
- Supply sick certificate as appropriate as soon as possible.
- You should not be at work if you have been diagnosed as having contracted the virus until there have been symptoms for at least 24 hours or if 7 days have elapsed since the onset of symptoms, whichever period is shorter.
- Staff who have influenza-like symptoms must comply with management request to leave the workplace in order to avoid spreading the infection.
- While at work you should follow hygiene guidelines as laid down by the HSE to avoid spreading germs and stay healthy: e.g. use a tissue only once and dispose of it carefully by binning or bagging it, wash your hands frequently with soap and water, avoid large crowds whenever possible etc.
- While in classrooms and offices, keep a window open to keep the temperature down to avoid the spreading of germs.

What should I do if I get sick with flu-like symptoms?

- You should contact the HSE Flu Information Line on free phone 1800 94 11 00 available 24 hours a day. Listen to the symptoms and the advice on home care. Most people with flu will be able to recover at home within a few days without needing anti-viral medicine or medical care. If your symptoms are severe or you are one of the high risk categories, then contact your GP immediately by telephone. They will decide if you need testing or treatment. Your doctor may arrange a home visit or decide to see you at the surgery. You should stay at home for 7 days while ill unless needing further care.
- You should discourage any visitors to your home.
- Take medicines such as paracetamol to reduce the symptoms.
- Drink plenty of fluids.

Further information:

Health Protection Surveillance Centre: www.hpsc.ie

Health Service Executive: www.hse.ie