



## PANDEMIC (H1N1) 2009 – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The World Health Organisation has now changed the official name of the pandemic virus from Influenza A(H1N1) to Pandemic (H1N1) 2009.

### 1) What is Pandemic (H1N1)?

Pandemic (H1N1) is a respiratory disease caused by type A influenza viruses. It spreads in the same way as ordinary colds and flus through the droplets that come out of the nose or mouth when someone coughs or sneezes. If someone coughs or sneezes into their hand, those droplets containing the virus are easily transferred to surfaces that the person touches, such as door handles and hand rails. If you touch these surfaces and touch your face, the virus can enter your system, and you can become infected.

### 2) What are the differences between Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 and the common cold?

It can be difficult at times to distinguish between the common cold and influenza. 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. An important additional feature of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 is that diarrhoea and vomiting occur occasionally. 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 $100^{\circ}\text{F}$ )	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

**3) How can I protect myself from catching influenza?**

- Wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly and frequently. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective if washing facilities are not available.
- Avoid unnecessary close contact with people who have influenza or have symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, fever or shivering.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Make sure children and others in your care follow this advice.

**4) What can I do to help prevent the spread of flu?**

If you are ill, or think you might be:

- Stay at home
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing with paper tissue if possible – the virus spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- Use a tissue only once and dispose of it quickly and carefully – bag and bin it.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or hand sanitiser.
- Wash hard surfaces such as kitchen worktops, door handles, etc. with a normal household cleaner as the virus can live on these surfaces.
- Avoid large crowds of people whenever possible.
- Make sure to tell your children and others to follow this advice.

**5) Who are those considered to be in a high risk group and needing treatment?**

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 > 40),
- Pregnant women
- People with haemoglobinopathies.

If you are in one of the above groups please contact your GP for advice.

**6) What should I do if I become sick?**

If you experience flu-like symptoms, return home and stay at home to avoid spreading infection to others. Contact your GP or the HSE Flu Information Line (1800 941 100) who will advise you if you need testing or treatment.

Do not go to the Medical Centre, your GP's surgery or to an A&E department, unless you have been instructed to do so by your GP or unless it is an emergency. This is to prevent the spread of influenza to other people there. If you wish to contact the Medical Centre, your GP or the A&E department, please do so by phone and follow their advice.

**7) Do I need to wear a face mask?**

No, there is no need for healthy individuals to wear a face masks unless you are caring for someone who may have influenza.

**8) What should I do if an office colleague of mine is diagnosed with Influenza?**

If you share an office with a colleague diagnosed with influenza you should continue to come to work as normal however remain vigilant and keep an eye out for any flu-like symptoms. If you are in a high risk group you should contact your GP and seek advice.

**9) What should I do if a student is diagnosed with influenza?**

You should continue to come to work as normal however remain vigilant and keep an eye out for any flu-like symptoms. If you are in a high risk group you should contact your GP and seek advice.

**10) What should I do if a student becomes ill during my class?**

If a student develops flu-like symptoms during class appropriate arrangements should be made for him/her to return home. The student should be advised to contact the Medical Centre, their GP or the HSE Flu Information Line (1800941100) for advice. If the student is a minor, his/her parents/guardians should be advised.

**11) What if a student becomes ill with flu while on a college excursion/trip?**

If a student develops flu-like symptoms while on a college excursion/trip the student should be isolated from the group and appropriate arrangements should be made for him/her to return home. The leader of the group should seek medical advice from their GP or the HSE Flu Information Line (1800 941 100) with regard to requirements for care/treatment, continued isolation, and arrangements for returning the student home. If the student is a minor, his/her parents/guardians should be advised.

**12) What are the sick leave arrangements for staff members diagnosed with influenza?**

Normal sick leave arrangements and procedures apply. Please contact the Human Resources Office for further details.

**13) I share work equipment such as telephones and computer keyboards with colleagues, are there any precautions I should take?**

Hand hygiene is vital so be sure to wash your hands often and thoroughly. In the interests of hygiene, rest breaks should be taken away from workstations. Departments can purchase cleaning wipes for hard surfaces such as computer keyboards and telephones which are available through the stationery suppliers.

**14) Will the Institute operate as normal?**

Yes, the Institute will operate as normal unless otherwise advised by the Department of Public Health or the HSE to do otherwise.

**15) Are there restrictions on travel?**

No, there are currently no restrictions on national or international travel. However, any persons with suspected or confirmed influenza should not travel if they feel unwell or until they have become non-infectious. If you are travelling abroad ensure that you are aware of the local influenza response protocols and in particular what to do if you develop symptoms.

**16) What should I do if I have just returned from a country affected by influenza?**

Influenza A is now spreading through many countries of the world including Ireland, therefore the advice for travellers is the same as that for non-travellers. As long as you are symptom-free, there is no need to stay away from work/college or to seek medical treatment. It is important that you remain vigilant for the symptoms of flu and at the first signs of these, stay at home contact your GP or the HSE Flu Information Line (1800 94 11 00) for advice.

**17) Where can I get more information?**

If you would like more information regarding Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 please contact one of the following:

Mary O' Doherty, Health & Safety Officer, Tel: 051-845517.

Medical Centre, Main Campus, Tel: 051-302873

Medical Centre, College St, Tel: 051-305671

Medical Centre, Barronstrand St, Tel: 051-852999

Students Union, Tel: 051-374744

WIT Health & Safety website:

<http://www.wit.ie/SchoolsDepartments/supportadministration/healthsafety/>

WIT Moodle site: <https://vle.wit.ie/>

Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC), <http://www.hpsc.ie>

Health Service Executive (HSE), <http://www.hse.ie>

Department of Health & Children, <http://www.dohc.ie>

World Health Organisation (WHO), <http://who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>

24 hour HSE Flu Information Line, Freephone: 1800 941 100