

# **Policy on the Outbreak of Influenza**

*Waterford Institute of Technology*  
*July 2009, Revision B*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Institute has developed this policy based on the advice and recommendations given by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Health Service Executive (HSE), the Department of Education & Science and the Department of Health & Children. It provides general information about Influenza A(H1N1) also referred to as Swine Influenza, advises on what actions the Institute will take to prevent the spread of the virus and provides instruction on the Institute's response in the event of an influenza pandemic.

The Institute's **Fighting Influenza Programme** consists of two phases:

- 1). Increasing awareness of influenza including how best to avoid its transmission and
- 2). Increasing the hygiene and sanitising facilities at the Institute.

This programme is being led by Ms. Mary O'Doherty, Health and Safety Officer, who will be the contact point and coordinator of the Institute's effort to reduce the impact of any influenza outbreak.

## 2. WHAT IS INFLUENZA A(H1N1)?

Influenza (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.

The symptoms of Influenza A(H1N1) are similar to those of a normal seasonal flu but are likely to be more severe and include:

- Sudden onset of fever, cough and/or shortness of breath
- Aching muscles

- Sore throat
- Runny nose and sneezing
- Loss of appetite
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Chills
- Vomiting and diarrhoea (not in all cases)

If you develop these symptoms you are advised to stay at home and contact your GP or Out-Of-Hours GP service immediately, by telephone. Do not go into the GP's surgery or A&E Department but stay at home and if necessary, you will be visited by your doctor.

### 3. WHAT IS AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC?

An influenza pandemic is a worldwide flu epidemic. It can start when three conditions have been met:

1. A new influenza virus subtype appears,
2. It infects humans, causing serious illness,
3. It spreads easily between humans.

A new virus may be a re-emerging human virus subtype which has not been in circulation for some time, or a virus originating in birds or pigs which has changed into a form that is highly infectious for humans. A pandemic can cause serious illness and death and can give rise to enormous social and economic disruption worldwide.

### 4. OUTLINE OF PANDEMIC PHASES

The World Health Organisation (WHO) uses six phases of pandemic alert as a system informing the world of the seriousness of the threat. These phases reflect the progression of an influenza pandemic from the first appearance of a new flu virus to wide international spread.

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <b>Phase 1</b> | No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. An influenza virus subtype that has caused human infection may be present in animals. If present in animals, the risk of human infection or disease is considered to be low. |
| <b>Phase 2</b> | No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. However, a circulating animal influenza subtype poses a substantial risk of human disease.   |
| <b>Phase 3</b> | Human infection(s) with a new subtype, but no human to human spread (or, at most, rare instances of spread to a close contact).  |
| <b>Phase 4</b> | Small cluster(s) with limited human to human transmission, suggesting that the virus is not well adapted to humans.  |
| <b>Phase 5</b> | Large cluster(s) but human to human spread still localised, suggesting that the virus is becoming better adapted to humans, but may not yet be fully transmissible. At this stage, there is a substantial risk of a pandemic.              |
| <b>Phase 6</b> | Pandemic phase: increased and sustained transmission in human population.  |

The World Health Organisation (WHO) have raised the influenza alert to pandemic level 6 because there is sustained human to human community transmission of the virus in more than one region.

The designation of alert phases, including decisions on when to move from one phase to another, is made by the Director-General of the World Health Organization. The transition between phases may be rapid and some phases may be skipped. Each alert phase coincides with a series of recommended activities to be undertaken by WHO, the international community, Governments and industry. Changes from one phase to another are triggered by several factors, which include the behaviour of the disease and the characteristics of circulating viruses.

The WHO Plan allows for additional national sub-divisions for Phase 2 onwards depending on whether a country is affected itself, has extensive travel/trade links with an affected country, or is not affected. The European Commission has published four levels of alert to be used in the European context during WHO Pandemic Phase 6:

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <b>Level 1</b> | Applies when there are no confirmed human cases infected with the pandemic virus in any EU Member State. |
| <b>Level 2</b> | Applies when there is one or more confirmed human case in any EU Member State.                           |
| <b>Level 3</b> | Applies when there is a confirmed outbreak in any EU Member State.                                       |
| <b>Level 4</b> | Applies when there is widespread transmission in the EU.   |

Specific Irish alert levels have also been developed for WHO Pandemic Phase 6:

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Irish Alert Level 1</b> | Cases only outside Ireland (in a country or countries with or without extensive Irish travel/trade links). |
| <b>Irish Alert Level 2</b> | New virus isolated in Ireland.   |
| <b>Irish Alert Level 3</b> | Outbreaks in Ireland.  |
| <b>Irish Alert Level 4</b> | Widespread activity in Ireland.  |

## 5. WILL THE INSTITUTE OPERATE AS USUAL?

A pandemic virus may spread quickly in educational establishments due to the volume and close proximity of people however the Institute will endeavour to continue to operate throughout a pandemic virus. The Department of Education and Science advise that the Institute should continue to operate normally unless advised by the Department of Public Health to close.

In the event of an influenza pandemic staff shortages are expected as staff will be absent from work if they are ill or need to care for family members or children who are ill. In the event that staff shortages or other circumstances make it impossible to continue normal operations the Institute's Executive Board will consider:

1. Partial closure of the Institute (core services essential to the continuation of the Institute's operations will be identified and certain services/functions may be discontinued temporarily).
2. Full closure of the Institute.

Any decision to close part or all of the Institute will be communicated to staff and students via email, public notices, departmental communication channels and/or local media (if required).

The Institute will promote the precautionary measures as outlined in Section 6 and communicate these measures to all staff members and students.

## 6. PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF INFLUENZA A(H1N1)

Preventing the introduction of Influenza A(H1N1) is the first and most important step. The Institute will advise all staff members /students on prevention measures to include:

1. Respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette - key measures which everyone should use at all times to prevent the transmission of respiratory infections.
2. Hand washing and sanitisation units.
3. Isolation of individuals who develop flu like symptoms while at the Institute while arrangements are made to send the individual home.
4. Cleaning advice to ensure the cleaning of surfaces that are likely to transmit infection.
5. Personal hygiene measures.

## 7. CLASS TRIPS & TRAVEL (DOMESTIC & FOREIGN)

Staff members and students may continue to go on trips both in this country and abroad. It is strongly recommended that organisers of trips abroad adhere to the up-to-date travel information and advice on the World Health Organisation website, <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>

If a staff member/student has recently returned from an affected country he/she should attend the Institute as normal unless they are suffering from flu-like symptoms. In the event that an individual develops flu-like symptoms then he/she should stay at home and contact your GP or Out-Of-Hours GP service immediately, by telephone. Do not go into the GP's surgery or A&E Department but stay at home where, if necessary, you will be visited by your doctor.

## 8. ACTION TO BE TAKEN IF AN INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPS FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS WHILE AT THE INSTITUTE

If a staff member/student develops flu like symptoms while at the Institute arrangements should be made for him/her to be sent home and he/she should be advised to contact his/her GP or the medical centre as soon as possible. If a student is a minor his/her parents should be contacted and advised about contacting their GP as soon as possible.

Any staff member/student waiting to go home should be placed in a suitable area away from other staff members/students but where they can be observed at all times to ensure their health status is not deteriorating.

## 9. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The Institute will communicate with staff members/students on how to plan for an influenza pandemic, what to do if they suspect they have the influenza virus and how to access services if needed. This communication strategy will include:

1. This plan which will be updated as necessary.
2. Email information circulated to staff.
3. Regularly updated website and moodle site.
4. Leaflet information and poster campaign.
5. Staff and student magazine publications.
6. Plasma screen notices.
7. Notice boards posters and information notices.
8. Students Union and class representatives.

## 10. REVISION OF PROGRAMME

The Institute will review and update the policy, as necessary to reflect changes in the influenza outbreak and/or changes in the Institute's work practices and communicate any such revision to staff and students.

## 11. FURTHER INFORMATION

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