

# Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (Human Swine Influenza)

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## Questions and answers for parents and carers

### What is Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (Human Swine Influenza)?

It is a new flu virus that is spread from person to person in the same way seasonal influenza and other common respiratory infections spread.

It is not spread by food. You cannot get human swine flu from eating properly handled and prepared pork or pork products.

### What are the symptoms of Human Swine Influenza?

They are similar to those of seasonal influenza - fever ( $>38^{\circ}\text{C}$  or a good history of fever) plus cough and/or sore throat. Other symptoms can include fatigue, myalgia, headache, body aches or chills.

### Australia has moved to the 'protect' phase for Human Swine Influenza. What does this mean for Queensland schools?

The 'protect' phase recognises that Human Swine Influenza is not as severe for the general population as originally envisaged. Most people are making a rapid and full recovery. The new phase focuses on protecting those people who are most at risk of developing severe illness from Human Swine Influenza.

It is business as usual for Queensland schools and schools will no longer close automatically if a student has Human Swine Influenza.

However, there is still flexibility to close single schools or classrooms to students in special circumstances, for example, in areas where the community is otherwise free of Human Swine Influenza or there is no transmission within the community, or where there are significant numbers of students in the vulnerable risk groups for Human Swine Influenza.

Staff and students should stay at home if they have flu-like symptoms, or go home if they develop symptoms while at school, to help contain the spread of Human Swine Influenza and other influenzas in school communities.

### What are the vulnerable groups?

Those most at risk of serious illness as a result of Human Swine Influenza include people with chronic diseases such as respiratory disease (including asthma), heart disease, diabetes, renal and liver disease, morbid obesity and immunosuppression. Pregnant women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also at higher risk from this infection.

### If a school has been closed to students, do students from that school have to limit contact with others?

Students and young children who remain well do not need to do anything other than avoid close contact with others who currently have Human Swine Influenza or flu like symptoms until the school reopens. If they develop flu-like symptoms they should stay at home and avoid contact with others.

### What should I do if my child has Human Swine Influenza?

If your child is confirmed as having human swine influenza, they should be kept at home until completely well, or until at least 24 hours after their fever has resolved, whichever is the longer. Restrict close contact (within one

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metre) with others as much as possible, especially with any family members who are in a vulnerable group. If your child is in a vulnerable group, or their illness is moderate or severe, antiviral medications such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza) may be prescribed by your doctor.

## What should I do if my child develops flu like symptoms?

- Keep your child at home and limit contact with others until your child is well. Your child may return to school and other activities when they are completely well, or when at least 24 hours have passed since their fever has resolved, whichever is the longer.
- Mild flu like symptoms in those at low risk generally can be treated at home with simple measures including fluids, rest and paracetamol to reduce fevers.
- Seek medical advice or contact 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) if symptoms are not relieved or worsen.
- Seek medical advice if your child is in a vulnerable group or has other underlying medical conditions. Antiviral treatment may be indicated and should be commenced as early as practicable and within the first 48 hours of illness.
- If your child's illness is moderate or severe, treatment is likely to be indicated and your child should be seen by a doctor.
- Please call ahead if seeing a doctor, advising of your child's symptoms.
- Ensure your child and those around them practice good hand hygiene, cover their nose and mouth when they cough and sneeze, and dispose of tissues promptly.

## What should a school do if a student on a trip is confirmed as having Human Swine Influenza?

The same approach should be taken to manage this situation as that taken when a student is diagnosed with any form of influenza. The student should be taken to a doctor and asked to restrict contact with others, practice good hand hygiene, cover their nose and mouth when they cough and sneeze, and dispose of tissues promptly.

## Is my child able to return to school immediately after interstate or overseas travel?

Students returning from trips from interstate and overseas areas will not be asked to stay away from school unless they are unwell.

Obviously, any student exhibiting flu-like symptoms should be kept away from school.

## Will student tours and visits to Queensland State schools be affected by the decision to move to the 'protect' phase?

Restrictions on study tours, or students entering Queensland no longer apply unless students are unwell.

Parents with inquiries about study tours or the International Student Program should contact Education Queensland International on 3224 6958 or your International Student Centre.

## Does the current influenza vaccination (flu shot) provide any protection against Human Swine Influenza?

The seasonal influenza vaccine is unlikely to offer protection against Human Swine Influenza. However, it is important that those groups for which annual flu vaccination is strongly recommended continue to be vaccinated.

These include:

- people aged 65 years or older and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years or older
- individuals aged 6 months or older with conditions which place them at risk of severe influenza

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- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 to 49 years with chronic disease including heart, lung, kidney or liver disease and diabetes
- pregnant women who will be in the second or third trimester of pregnancy during the flu season (go to <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/flu/facts/vaccination.asp#2> for further information)

## What is the best way to protect myself or my children from Human Swine Influenza?

The best way to protect yourself and others is to:

- stay home when you are sick
- wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand gel
- wash your hands prior to touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- when coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with disposable tissues which should be disposed of immediately
- do not share items such as cigarettes, glasses or cups, lipstick, toys or anything which could be contaminated with respiratory secretions
- maintain at least a one metre distance from people who have flu-like symptoms such as coughing or sneezing

## What tests are conducted to determine if someone has Human Swine Influenza?

A nose or throat swab may be taken to diagnose infection. However, testing is no longer considered necessary for most people. If you need to see a doctor, they will determine whether testing is necessary.

## Are there any situations where I or my children need to wear a face mask?

Current advice received from Queensland Health is that there is no requirement for staff or students to wear a face mask to protect the wearer. Masks are useful for people who have flu-like symptoms until they can isolate themselves from others.

It is more important to implement preventative measures such as maintaining good hand hygiene and avoiding close contact with persons who are coughing and sneezing. Staff or students should stay home when they are sick. Students will be sent home if they become unwell while at school.

## How can hand-washing reduce the spread of influenza?

When a person with influenza coughs or sneezes, the droplets with the virus land on surfaces around the person. If you touch these surfaces you can transmit the virus through your eyes, nose and mouth when you touch them.

Washing your hands frequently with soap and water and drying thoroughly or using alcohol-based hand gels is an effective means of reducing the risk of catching the flu virus. Avoiding touching your face with your hands further decreases the risk.

For further information visit the Queensland Health Website at <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/swineflu>, call 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84) or contact your local doctor.

You can also download the Department's [Infection Control Guidelines](#) and visit the Department's Influenza website at <http://education.qld.gov.au/health/healthpromotion/influenza.html>