



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

## **Information and medical advice about Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Influenza for people with specific medical conditions**

*Version 2.0*

*14.8.09*

### **What is Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Influenza?**

Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 was formerly known as Influenza A(H1N1) or Swine Flu.

It is a type of flu virus. In the past this virus affected pigs, and only occasionally affected people who had close contact with pigs. The virus has now changed and can spread easily from person to person. It is called pandemic flu because people all over the world are being infected by it. For the majority of people it is a mild disease; however some people can develop complications such as pneumonia.

### **Are there people at higher risk of complications?**

Some people are at higher risk of complications from flu. They may require additional treatment or monitoring.

These are patients with chronic lung, heart, kidney, liver, or neurological disease; immunosuppression (whether caused by disease or treatment); diabetes mellitus; people aged 65 years and older; children <5 years (children <2 years are at higher risk of severe complications); people on medication for asthma, severely obese people (Body Mass Index of 40 or greater), pregnant women and people with haemoglobinopathies.

### **Is there a vaccine against Pandemic Influenza?**



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Yes, there is a vaccine against Pandemic Influenza which is currently being tested. The vaccine should become available to Ireland and other countries in the later part of this year. It will be delivered in stages, so we will offer vaccine to high-risk people first (see list above), along with healthcare staff and other essential workers. The HSE will carry out a major public information campaign when the vaccination programme is ready to begin.

### **What can people do to protect themselves from Pandemic Influenza?**

Preventing the spread of germs is the single most effective way to slow the spread of influenza.

1. Wash your hands often with soap and water and especially after coughing and sneezing and before eating. Alcohol-based hand cleaners (minimum 60% alcohol) are also effective
2. Avoid unnecessary close contact with people who have influenza
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with your hands – germs spread this way
4. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and put your used tissue in a wastebasket. Then where possible, decontaminate your hands using soap and water or alcohol gel for at least 15 seconds.
5. If you have no tissues immediately available, coughing or sneezing into your arm or sleeve (**not** into your hand) is recommended.

### **How else should people with medical conditions prepare for the possibility of spread of the Pandemic Influenza virus?**

A) Vaccines:



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

- **It is important that when advised to get the Pandemic vaccine or the seasonal influenza vaccine that people in a high risk group take them.** These people are in the priority group to receive the pandemic vaccine.

There will be guidance coming regarding the optimal timing of when to receive the seasonal influenza vaccine.

The seasonal influenza vaccine is the influenza vaccine that is given every year against the seasonal flu. It does not protect against Pandemic (H1N1) 2009- however it will be important to have this vaccine to protect your health and prevent seasonal influenza illness.

- Consult your doctor and make sure all your vaccinations are up-to-date, including the pneumococcal vaccine (against bacterial pneumonia caused by the *Streptococcus pneumoniae*). This type of bacterial pneumonia can be a problem particularly for immunocompromised individuals and can also cause complications for people who have the flu. Your doctor will know if you need this vaccine.
- Please note that the Pandemic vaccine is different to the Seasonal influenza vaccine.

#### B) Flu friends:

- Confirm a network of 'flu friends' – friends and relatives – who could help you if you fall ill. They could collect medicines and other supplies for you so you do not have to leave home and possibly spread the virus.



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

c) General measures:

- Ensure that you know exactly what medication you or your child is currently taking as part of routine care.
- Making sure you have a supply of paracetamol, a thermometer, non-perishable food items.
- Keep key telephone numbers close to hand; for example:
  - your Hospital Unit,
  - your GP,
  - your flu-friend(s)
  - The HSE Flu Information Line (**Freephone 1800 94 11 00**).

**How will I know if I have got Pandemic Influenza?**

You will have the same symptoms as if you had ordinary flu - they will probably come on suddenly, and may be severe. They may include:

- Temperature over 38°C/100.4°F and some of the following
- Dry cough
- Headache
- Severe weakness and fatigue
- Aching muscles and joints
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Vomiting / diarrhoea

These can lead to complications some of which may be severe.

**What should people do if they think they may have Pandemic Influenza?**

Anyone in the high risk group for complications from Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 needs to contact their doctor as quickly as possible.

- Contact your GP by phone and follow his or her instructions.



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

- Discourage any visitors
- Take medicines such as paracetamol to reduce the symptoms
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Most people with flu will recover within a few days.
- Stay at home for up to 7 days or until you fully recover (whichever is the longer).
- Please read '*Guidance on caring for persons at home with Influenza A (H1N1)v*'. This is available on <http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza/AdvicefortheGeneralPublic/File,3660.en.pdf>.
- If you need to go to a doctor's office or to an emergency room, please telephone before you go and tell them that you think you might have Pandemic (H1N1) 2009. When you are there cover your mouth and nose with a facemask or a cloth; make yourself known to staff. Do not sit in the waiting area with other patients.

### **When should a person get emergency medical care?**

If you are an adult contact your GP urgently if you notice:

- Increased shortness of breath at rest or while doing very little
- Painful or difficult breathing
- Coughing up bloody sputum
- Drowsiness, disorientation or confusion
- Fever for 4-5 days and not starting to get better (or getting worse)
- Starting to feel better then developing high fever and feeling unwell again



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

- If you are caring for a child contact your GP urgently if you notice:
  - Fast breathing or trouble breathing
  - Bluish skin colour
  - Not drinking enough fluids
  - Not waking up or poorly responsive
  - Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
  - Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
  - Fever with a rash.

### **Is there treatment for Pandemic (H1N1) 2009?**

Yes. The Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus is sensitive to antiviral drugs. These medicines may reduce the severity of the illness. Treatment is most effective if started as soon as possible (ideally within 48 hours of symptom onset), but may also be given to very sick or high risk people even after 48 hours.

Please note the anti-viral medications and the pandemic vaccines are different. The anti-viral medication most likely to be prescribed for people with CF is Oseltamivir (Tamiflu). This is a capsule, which is taken orally for a number of days. The vaccine will be given by injection.

### **I'm on immunosuppressants. Am I more at risk than other people from Pandemic Influenza?**

Yes. If you take immunosuppressant treatment you have a greater risk of becoming infected with any virus, including flu, and will be less able to fight it off once you have it.



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

### **Can I take antivirals if I'm on immunosuppressants?**

Yes, it is safe for you to take antivirals.

### **Can I take antivirals if I have mild to moderate kidney disease?**

Yes, you will be treated as any other person would be. This means you can take antivirals, if necessary.

### **Can I take antivirals if I have severe kidney disease?**

Usually Yes. However your doctor will make this decision.

### **Are people with asthma or other respiratory problems more at risk from Pandemic Influenza?**

You are no more likely to catch Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 than anyone else. However, if you do catch a respiratory infection, including Pandemic (H1N1) 2009, it will add to the breathing difficulties you may have.

### **What advice is there for people with asthma or other respiratory problems?**

If you get Pandemic (H1N1) 2009, you are at greater risk of a more severe illness. It is therefore very important that you follow good hygiene practices to protect against flu (see above) and take appropriate actions if you develop flu-like symptoms (see above). See the advice on the HPSC website ([www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie)) "Taking care of a sick person with Flu", particularly if you are using a nebuliser.

If you have **cystic fibrosis** please look at the advice on the HPSC and CFAI websites ([www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie) or [www.cfireland.ie](http://www.cfireland.ie)) "*Information and medical advice about Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 for people with Cystic Fibrosis (CF)*".



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

### **Can I take antivirals if I have asthma or other respiratory problems?**

Yes - however your doctor will advise you as some antivirals are more suitable for those with asthma or other respiratory problems.

### **I have diabetes - am I at more at risk from Pandemic (H1N1) 2009?**

You are no more likely to catch Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 than anyone else. However, if you do catch it, your blood glucose may increase and your diabetes treatment may need to be adjusted accordingly.

### **What should I do if my blood glucose increases?**

If you find your blood glucose has increased, or you develop thirst and are urinating more often, call your GP. If you are on insulin and testing your own blood glucose, you may be advised to do this more often so you can adjust your dose according to the results. If you start to vomit or become increasingly unwell, call your GP as soon as possible.

### **Is there any advice for people with liver disease?**

If you have liver disease you are no more likely to catch Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 than anyone else. If you do catch it, antivirals are safe to take – there is no interaction between these and antivirals you may already be taking to treat hepatitis. However the type and dose of antiviral will be decided by your doctor.



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

## **Can I take antivirals if I am on epilepsy treatment?**

Yes. There is no evidence that antiviral treatments affect medicines taken to control epilepsy.

## **Where can I find information about Pandemic (H1N1) 2009?**

### **Telephone:**

Further information is available from the HSE Flu Information Line.

The Flu Information Line is available 24 hours a day and is your primary source of information on Pandemic (H1N1) 2009.

**Freephone 1800 94 11 00**

### **Websites:**

The Health Service Executive Website will be kept updated every day with latest information and advice. Check it often:

<http://www.swineflu.ie/>

Department of Health and Children:

[www.dohc.ie](http://www.dohc.ie)

Health Protection Surveillance Centre:

<http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza>

### **Helpful Documents:**

*Influenza A (H1N1): Frequently asked questions*

<http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza/AdvicefortheGeneralPublic/FrequentlyAskedQuestions/>



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

*How can I prevent myself catching influenza?*

<http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza/AdvicefortheGeneralPublic/File,3662,en.pdf>

*Guidance for caring for persons at home with Influenza A(H1N1)v:*

<http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza/AdvicefortheGeneralPublic/File,3660,en.pdf>