

# Guidance for crèches/preschool settings in preparing for and managing pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza (Swine Flu)

18<sup>th</sup> September 2009

v2.0

**These recommendations are based on current information and are subject to change based on ongoing surveillance and continuous risk assessment.**

## Background

This document provides interim public health guidance for crèche/preschool settings in preparing for and managing infection with pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza. This guidance includes recommendations on hygiene measures that should be put in place now in order to prevent the spread of respiratory illness, and planning activities that should occur in the event of cases of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 occurring in the crèche/preschool.

Children are very susceptible to getting this new virus and crèche/preschools may serve as an amplification point for spread of this new virus in a community. Crèche/preschool facilities can help prevent the spread of pandemic influenza by implementing good health practices now and preparing for activities that need to occur in the event of cases of influenza occurring in the crèche/preschool.

It is important that crèche/preschool facilities develop contingency plans to manage flu and that staff are familiar with those plans. This includes having an up-to-date list of contact numbers for all staff and parents/guardians.

## Guidance

### **1. Infection control - preventing the spread of respiratory illness through knowledge of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza and practice of good respiratory and hand hygiene. Crèches/preschools should:**

- Display posters on good hygiene practices, including:
  - What to do to prevent spread of respiratory illness
  - Hand hygiene - wash hands regularly, particularly after coughing and sneezing or blowing nose  
(available at [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie))
- Provide information to staff and children and their parents, including:
  - The symptoms of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 infection

- What to do in the event of a person presenting with influenza like symptoms
- Hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene (available at [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie) )
- Promote good hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette to staff, children and parents
- If children are from other countries, check that their parents can access information in their own languages
- Have a system in place for checking children and staff each day as they arrive to see if they have symptoms of flu. Make it clear that any child or staff member who is sick will not be allowed to remain at the child care facility
- Remind staff members to stay home if they think they have symptoms of flu
- Discourage the sharing of pencils, crayons and pens during the pandemic. Encourage the wiping and cleaning of hands and objects when passing round objects like musical instruments or toys. Because of the difficulty of cleaning soft toys adequately, consider removing soft toys
- Do not allow children to share wind instruments
- Get children to clean hands after carpet work; or get them to sit on chairs instead of the floor
- Ensure that environmental cleaning procedures to prevent the spread of respiratory illness are in place:
  - Ensure adequate supplies of cleaning materials are readily available
  - Ensure there are procedures for regular cleaning of hard surfaces
  - Ensure that hand hygiene facilities are adequate and working properly. Minimum standards required at all times are soap, water and a method of drying that is not shared between children (paper towels, pull down towels or automatic hand dryers are preferred.
  - In the absence of hand-washing facilities, alcohol-based hand rub may be used as an alternative
  - If ingested, alcohol-based hand sanitizers can cause alcohol poisoning and in a small number of cases skin irritation in small children and so should only be used under supervision and should be kept out of reach of children at all other times
  - Check that you have procedures for isolating and caring for children who fall ill while awaiting collection by parent/guardian and for obtaining/administering treatment if necessary

## **2. Communication and guardianship arrangements for children**

In the event that cases of influenza due to pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus occur in the crèche/preschool and that the circumstances are such that Public Health advises closure, it will be essential to have a communications plan which will include:

- Up to date contact details of the children's parents/carers - the crèche/preschool should ensure that the identified guardian has provided current contact and emergency contact number
- An estimate of the number of children who may need to remain in the crèche/preschool e.g. parents working and unable to collect until specified time – these children may need to be isolated and cared for until collected

- GP contact details for all children attending, and permission to call the GP if necessary
- Up to date contact details for the local Department of Public Health (see Appendix 1)
- Up to date list of contact details of staff

### **3. *Actions in the event of a case/cases of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza occurring in a crèche/preschool***

Crèches/preschools need to be prepared to recognise and respond if a child develops symptoms consistent with pandemic influenza. This may build on policies already in place to deal with sick children.

#### ***a. Early recognition of influenza like symptoms and subsequent actions.***

All staff should be able to recognise symptoms of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza. The symptoms of pandemic influenza are like those of seasonal flu. There is usually sudden onset of fever ( $\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}/100^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and cough or sore throat. Other symptoms can include: runny nose, limb or joint pain, headache, vomiting or diarrhoea.

Parents/guardians should be contacted to bring the child with influenza like illness (ILI) home as soon as possible

The crèche/preschool should encourage parents to seek early medical assessment for all children less than 5 years of age and for children with flu-like symptoms at higher risk of complications from flu. Staff with flu-like symptoms at higher risk of complications from flu should do the same (see Appendix 2 for list of those at higher risk).

The crèche/preschool should have prior permission from parents to enable urgent medical assessment if required.

While awaiting for parents/guardians to collect their child the guidance on caring for a child with ILI should be followed (see below)

The child/staff member with influenza will be advised to stay at home for seven days from the onset of symptoms.

#### ***b. Actions in the event of an unusual number of people presenting with influenza like illness or unusual severity of illness (eg child requiring admission to ICU)***

There should be a policy for notifying the local Department of Public Health by phone (Appendix 1).

#### ***c. Exclusion policy***

Crèche/preschools should have clear policies on exclusion of staff and children with flu-like illness.

Crèche/preschools should remind parents and carers that children displaying flu-like symptoms while at home (weekends and holidays) should stay at home and not return to crèche/preschool for seven days from onset of symptoms.

There is no need for any staff member or child (including those at risk of complications and those who are pregnant) to stay at home from crèche/preschool if they are well.

#### **4. Preparation for closure of a crèche/preschool**

In certain circumstances there may be advice to close on public health grounds for a short period of time (usually 7 days). Crèche/preschools must develop plans for partial and total closure.

- Each crèche/preschool should have a governance structure for implementation of closure.
- Each crèche/preschool should have business continuity plans in place to deal with crèche/preschool closure on public health recommendation or due to staff absences. These should include:
  - Staff working arrangements in event of crèche/preschool being closed
  - Communications with parents/carers when crèche/preschool is closed
  - If closed on public health recommendation, Public Health will advise on re-opening
  - Plans for the partial re-opening of the crèche/preschool (where feasible) as well as full re-opening of the educational institution.
- Each crèche/preschool must plan for managing staff shortages due to staff being sick or taking leave due to their own children being sick.
- If closure is advised alternative arrangements will be needed for care of children.

#### **5. Caring for a child who becomes ill with symptoms suggestive of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza while in crèche/preschool facility**

If a child becomes ill with symptoms suggestive of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza while in the crèche/preschool, the following actions should be taken:

- A member of staff should be nominated to look after the child in an isolation room with the door of the room left open.
- The number of staff who have close contact with the sick child should be kept to a minimum.
- The staff member caring for the child should not sit/stay within one meter of the child unless the child needs assistance. This may not be possible with small babies. When providing care for the child, the staff member should observe good hand hygiene practices and should consider wearing a surgical mask while caring for the sick child.
- When holding small children who are sick, their chin should be placed on the carer's shoulder so that they will not cough in the carer's face.
- When the child has gone home, ensure that the isolation room is thoroughly cleaned before next use.
- Staff looking after affected children should not work with asymptomatic children at the same time.
- Staff at risk of complications if infected should avoid caring for symptomatic children (see 'Guidance for caring for persons at home with Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Influenza' at <http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza/AdvicefortheGeneralPublic/File,3660,en.pdf>).

- Staff should clean their hands thoroughly with soap and water or alcohol hand rub before and after any contact with symptomatic children or staff and their environment.
- Staff and children should be encouraged to avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth.
- Further guidance on caring for a child with Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 can be found at 'Guidance for caring for persons at home with Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Influenza' at <http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza/AdvicefortheGeneralPublic/File,3660,en.pdf>

## **6. Ensuring appropriate message to children**

It is important that the right message is communicated to children attending the crèche/preschool.

- Teach and encourage children in an age-appropriate way to follow the advice on personal hygiene (hand washing, respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette, including minimising contact between hands and mouth/nose, use of tissues). Emphasise that this is serious, but take care not to scare younger or impressionable children.
- It is not possible for staff to ensure that every child is following the advice all of the time, but frequent reminders should help. This advice will also help in the prevention of other infections.

## Appendix 1: Contact Details for HSE Departments of Public Health (and counties they cover)

<b>HSE North West</b> Tel 071-9852900 Donegal Leitrim Sligo	<b>HSE Midlands</b> Tel 057-9359891 Longford Westmeath Offaly Laois
<b>HSE South</b> Tel 021-4927601 Cork Kerry	<b>HSE MidWest</b> Tel 061-483337 Clare Limerick Tipperary North
<b>HSE North East</b> Tel 046-9076412 Cavan Monaghan Louth Meath	<b>HSE SouthEast</b> Tel 056-7784124 Tipperary South Waterford Kilkenny Carlow Wexford
<b>HSE East</b> Tel 01-635 2000 Kildare Dublin Wicklow	<b>HSE West</b> Tel 091-775 200 Mayo Roscommon Galway

## Appendix 2

### Those considered to be in high-risk groups for complications of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 infection.

People 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 (BMI ≥40), pregnant women and people with haemoglobinopathies.