

H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Flu)

2pm 26 May 2009

There are confirmed cases of this strain of influenza in a broad spread of countries across the world, including Australia.

Victoria has had confirmed cases of Human Swine Influenza since 20 May 2009.

Evidence from around the world is showing that this influenza is mainly occurring in normally healthy young adults.

For the most up-to-date information:

- Visit www.health.vic.gov.au
- Call the Influenza Hotline on 180 2007 or
- Call Nurse-on-Call on 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (freecall 24 hours, 7 days)

What is H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Influenza)?

H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Influenza) is a respiratory disease caused by a new influenza virus.

How does H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Influenza) spread?

Spread of H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Influenza) virus is thought to be happening the same way seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing.

Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Influenza) virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. However, at this time, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

Transmission may also occur when an infected person contaminates an object or surface, and another person touches that surface and then touches their mouth or nose.

The virus may persist on hard surfaces for 1-2 days, particularly in cold or low humidity conditions.

The virus may remain viable on hands for 30 minutes.

How long can an infected person spread H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Influenza) to others?

People with H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Influenza) virus should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic and for up to seven days following illness onset.

Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

Some of the confirmed cases are school children, are their schools being closed?

You can find the most up to date information relating to schools on the website of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development at www.education.vic.gov.au.

If your child attends a school of a confirmed case of Human Swine Influenza, you will be notified and instructed what to do.

Are Boarding Schools and similar places such as school camps being affected?

You can find the most up to date information relating to schools on the website of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development at www.education.vic.gov.au

If your child attends a boarding school or has been to a school camp with a confirmed case of Human Swine Influenza, you will be notified and instructed what to do.

My child goes to school with a child who has been confirmed to have H1N1 Influenza 09. Should I be concerned?

You should be reassured that every possible measure is being taken to ensure the safety of all children who attend school with a confirmed case.

As a precaution, classmates of children confirmed with Human Swine Influenza may be placed in home quarantine and treated with antiviral medication.

For students not in classes with the confirmed cases, quarantine is not needed. If the school is closed as a precautionary measure, students however are being asked to restrict their movements in the community (eg - picture theatres, parties). Equally for their families and other household members who have no restrictions on their movements.

Parents of students at affected schools will be provided with health information and have been asked to contact their local GP or Nurse-On-Call if their child does develop symptoms of flu.

How do I know if I am a contact? What does contact mean?

A contact is someone who has had close contact with a confirmed case of H1N1 Influenza 09(Human Swine Flu). The Department of Human Services is conducting a thorough process of contact tracing to ensure all members of the community who have been in direct contact with a confirmed case are advised and treated with anti-viral medication.

Close contact must have occurred within the last seven days. It must also have been significant contact. This means that the contact must have lasted more than fifteen minutes and been less than one metre distance.

For schools and childcare centres, close contact is also considered to have occurred when sharing a classroom more than four hours.

People who live in the same house at the time a person becomes infected are also considered close contacts.

What do I do if I have come into contact with someone who has Swine Flu?

If you have been in close contact with a confirmed case of H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Influenza) and you are feeling unwell with a fever and a cough or cold symptoms, you should present to your doctor for the best possible advice.

It is recommended that you call ahead and alert clinic staff to your arrival so the proper arrangements can be made.

What does home quarantine involve?

People who are either ill with H1N1 Influenza 09 or who have been in close contact with those who have been confirmed to have H1N1 influenza have been asked to remain in home quarantine for at least seven days.

This means that they must remain at home, and not attend work or school. No visitors should attend the house where people are in quarantine.

People with H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Flu) virus are considered potentially contagious from one day before they start showing symptoms for as long as they are symptomatic and for up to seven days following illness onset.

Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

For more detailed information, please visit: www.dhs.vic.gov.au

What does isolation mean? Is this different from quarantine?

Isolation means the same as being in home quarantine. See above.

How can I reduce the risk of contracting H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Influenza)?

Personal hygiene remains vital. We should all follow flu season hygiene procedures which can greatly reduce the chances of getting influenza or passing it on to others.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in a plastic-lined rubbish bin after you use it.
- Regular hand washing with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze and before meals. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- If you have the influenza, you should avoid public places and close contact with others, especially children.

Where can I find out more information about the situation with Human Swine Flu in Victoria?

You should visit www.health.vic.gov.au or call the National Influenza Hotline on 180 2007.

Will having the normal influenza vaccinations reduce my/my child's risk of contracting Human Swine Influenza?

It is not expected that the normal influenza vaccination will reduce the risk of contracting Swine Influenza. However it is still recommended, particularly for anyone in the vulnerable groups (over 65 or immunocompromised) should still go and be vaccinated.

What do I do if I feel unwell?

Please call your GP if you have an Influenza-like illness (fever, cough and fatigue) and have travelled to Mexico, USA, Canada, Japan or Panama in the past seven days, or have been in direct contact with a confirmed case of Human Swine Flu.

Please call your local hospital only if you are *seriously unwell* with flu like symptoms and have travelled to Mexico, USA, Canada, Japan or Panama in past seven days, or have been in direct contact with a confirmed case of Human Swine Flu.

Do I need to wear a mask in public? There is little evidence that people who are well, are protected by wearing a surgical mask.

Masks are most effective when worn by people who are ill. It is up to individuals to make their own judgement about wearing face masks.

I have a staff member who has come into contact with a swine flu confirmed case and has been placed into quarantine. When can they return to work?

Close contacts of confirmed cases will be placed into quarantine for seven days from the last time they were in contact with the confirmed case. If they develop Human Swine Flu their quarantine period will be extended to seven days after the onset of their symptoms.

If another member of their household becomes unwell during those seven days the quarantine will be extended to seven days from the onset of their symptoms and so on.

After the quarantine period is up, your staff member will be fine to return to work.

Please show consideration when assessing your staff members need for leave in this situation.

What do I do if someone at my school/workplace is unwell?

As with all influenza viruses, personal hygiene remains vital in protecting yourself against the H1N1 virus. Some hygiene procedures which can greatly reduce the chances of getting influenza or passing it on to others:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in a plastic lined rubbish bin after you use it.
- Wash your hands with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze and before meals. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- If you have the influenza, you should avoid public places and close contact with others, especially children.

A child of one of my staff members attends a school that has been closed to reduce the risk of Human Swine Flu spread. Is my staff member safe to come into the office?

Yes, unless your staff member's child is ill and showing symptoms of flu, it is safe for your staff member to return to work. GPs will not be providing 'all-clear' certificates for staff to return to work.

Please show consideration when assessing the parents needs for leave as a carer.

If this situation escalates into a pandemic, how do I manage my workplace?

Now is the right time for you to be reviewing your businesses continuity plan. It is hoped that some businesses may be able to allow their staff to do some work from home when appropriate. Details of Victoria's pandemic plan can be found at www.health.vic.gov.au/pandemicinfluenza.

What resources are available for businesses?

Visit www.health.vic.gov.au/pandemicinfluenza for resources to help you develop your business continuity plan.

What is the Government doing to reduce the risk of H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Influenza) to Australians?

The State and Federal Governments are well prepared.

Expert contact tracing is occurring in relation to those cases of confirmed human swine influenza to determine how and when they may have contracted the flu in order to better inform the government's response to swine flu and the information given to the Victorian public.

Australia has very good communicable disease surveillance and control systems in place to detect and respond to outbreaks of illness and is ready to escalate the level of response when and if required.

Nation-wide border security measures have been implemented, including thermal imaging at major international airports and screening of all incoming international flights.