

# Department of Education and Early Childhood Development – Victoria

For all schools, principals, regional directors and assistant regional directors

## **S265-2009 H1N1 Influenza (Human Swine Flu) 29 May 2009 1.00 pm Update**

### **General**

1. A number of H1N1 Influenza (Human Swine Flu) cases have been confirmed in school-aged children in Victoria.
2. The Department of Human Services (DHS) is continuing to liaise with affected children's families and their schools on all appropriate action. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and the Catholic and Independent School education authorities continue to work closely with DHS.
3. Parents of all children at the schools where H1N1 Influenza cases have been confirmed have been provided with appropriate information.
4. DHS, in consultation with DEECD, will continue to monitor the situation and will provide further advice as additional information becomes available.
5. It is important to note that DHS is advising that the current cases of H1N1 Influenza are exhibiting mild symptoms of illness, similar to a range of other flu viruses that are common during winter.
6. While it is important to be vigilant of H1N1 Influenza there is no need for undue alarm.

### **Voluntary quarantine and school closures**

7. In instances where a parent advises a school that their child/ren has been confirmed as a H1N1 Influenza case, please contact the DEECD Incident Coordination Centre on 1800 059 866.
8. If your school is confirmed as being affected by H1N1 Influenza, a member of the DEECD Incident Coordination Centre or your regional office will provide you with information for parents and staff. Media support can also be provided, where required.
9. Principals must not quarantine children or partially or fully close their schools without direction by the DEECD Incident Coordination Centre or your regional office. This direction will be based on advice from DHS. DHS is the responsible department for decisions regarding quarantine of people affected by H1N1 Influenza.
10. DHS is also asking parents of children returning from USA, Canada, Japan, Mexico and Panama to voluntarily keep their children home for seven (7) days from arrival back in Australia. This is a further precautionary measure to assist in managing the further spread of the virus. At this stage, the exclusion does not affect teachers and teachers

should continue with normal duties. This decision is based on information available so far about how this virus spreads.

11. Item 10 applies to international students who are planning to visit to their homes during the forthcoming term break and return to Victoria to resume their studies in Term 3.

### **Inter-school related activities**

12. Students in quarantine must not participate in inter-school related activities.
13. Students that are not in quarantine but whose school is closed due to H1N1 Influenza are requested by DHS, as a precautionary measure, to limit their exposure to the community, particularly in close contact environments (for example, parties and cinemas).
14. Schools that have been closed due to H1N1 Influenza should not conduct school camps during their closure period.
15. All schools in the Northern and Western Regions (the regions that have been the most affected by the virus) are asked to consider limiting their inter-school activities.

### **Senior secondary students**

16. With mid-year exams and assessments approaching, secondary schools should consider the potential for H1N1 Influenza to impact Year 12 students and of the possible flow-on impact on their year-end results.
17. Many secondary schools have separate facilities and study areas for Year 12 students. Schools are encouraged to maintain these facilities for the exclusive use by Year 12 students where possible.
18. Where schools do not have exclusive facilities for Year 12 students, schools are encouraged to consider further reasonable actions that could be undertaken to support Year 12 students during this important time of their school year.
19. If cases of H1N1 Influenza are confirmed in your school which may impact on Year 12 students, please contact the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) Special Provision Unit by telephone on 1800 205 455 to discuss further action and support.

### **Special developmental schools or schools with high proportions of children who would normally be at significant risk during the flu season**

20. Special developmental schools should be especially vigilant in avoiding cross infection between students and teachers and in ensuring children obtain their regular flu vaccine.
21. Children who show any signs of illness should be sent home and the family advised to see a doctor.
22. Doctors will be separately advised to test children at risk (in the general population) for H1N1 Influenza.

### **Media**

23. Schools affected by H1N1 Influenza may be contacted by the media.

24. DEECD media staff are available to support schools, if required. Please call Anna Malbon, Media Manager, 9947 1844 or 0409 003 634 or Paul Barber, Deputy Media Manager, on 9637 2178 or 0413 756 023 for further support.
25. The principal or school council president is the spokesperson authorised to speak on behalf of respective individual school issues.
26. Queries and concerns regarding health issues are to be directed to DHS.

### **Communicating with parents**

27. It is recommended that you provide your parents with regular updates – irrespective of whether your school is directly affected by H1N1 Influenza. Schools not affected by the virus may wish to reinforce the importance of good general hygiene habits to parents in their school newsletters. Suggested newsletter text is provided below:

*As parents would be aware there are currently a number of confirmed cases of H1N1 Influenza (Human Swine Flu) in Victoria. Appropriate measures are being taken in relation to these cases. Specific concerns from parents about H1N1 Influenza can be referred to any of the following:*

- **The Swine Influenza Hotline Tel. 180 2007**
- **Nurse-on-Call Tel. 1300 606 024** – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- **Your doctor (GP)** – if you have an influenza-like illness (fever, cough and fatigue) and have travelled to Mexico or California, Arizona, New Mexico or Texas in the past seven days.

*Families should continue with standard good general health hygiene practices, such as ensuring your children undertake regular hand washing and cover their nose and mouth if sneezing and coughing.*

*This practice is being reinforced with your children while at school.*

*If your children are unwell, you should seek medical attention and avoid public places and close contact with others.*

*The Department of Human Services is also asking parents of children returning from USA, Canada, Japan, Mexico and Panama to voluntarily keep their children home for seven (7) days from arrival back in Australia. This is a further precautionary measure to assist in managing the further spread of the virus.*

28. If DEECD advises that your school is affected by a confirmed case of H1N1 Influenza:
  - At a minimum, you should formally advise parents in writing. Form letters to assist with this will be provided by the DEECD Incident Coordination Centre or your regional office
  - Wherever possible, it is recommended that you also hold a face-to-face meeting with parents. If parents need to be advised of decisions made out of school or service hours, you should advise parents by phone or SMS.
29. Teachers at schools affected by H1N1 Influenza should provide students with school learning materials that can be used at home.
30. It is important that you remind parents to keep their contact details up-to-date.

## General hygiene in schools

31. Good general hygiene is an important part of preventing the spread of H1N1 Influenza.
32. Schools should continue to reinforce to children the importance of washing their hands and covering their nose and mouth if sneezing and coughing.
33. Schools should review their provision of basic hygiene products (i.e. soap or liquid soap and paper towels) to students and provide these products if not already available.
34. Primary schools may also wish to consider reinforcing basic hygiene habits, such as hand washing, by making specific time available for students to wash and dry hands before and after lunch breaks.

### Actions

- Principals should note that while it is important to be vigilant of H1N1 Influenza there is no need for undue alarm.
- Any school action (such as class quarantine or school closure) relating to H1N1 Influenza will be directed by the DEECD Incident Coordination Centre on advice from DHS. Schools should not undertake any action relating to the H1N1 virus unless directed by DEECD.
- Schools should provide parents with regular updates – irrespective of whether the school is directly affected by H1N1 Influenza.
- Schools should review their provision of basic hygiene products (i.e. soap or liquid soap and paper towels) to students and provide these products if not already available.
- Contact the DEECD Incident Coordination Centre on 1800 059 866 with any student-related queries or concerns.

### Further information

Specific health queries about H1N1 Influenza can be directed to any of the following:

- The **Swine Influenza Hotline Tel. 180 2007**
- **Nurse-on-Call Tel. 1300 606 024** – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- **Your doctor (GP)** – if you have an influenza-like illness (fever, cough and fatigue).

**Prof Peter Dawkins**  
**Secretary**