

Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (Human Swine Influenza)

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Questions and answers for schools

Australia has moved to the 'protect' phase for Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (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.

Schools are asked to remain alert to the symptoms of Human Swine Influenza and continue to promote good hygiene practice. Staff and students should stay at home, or be sent home, if they have flu like symptoms 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.

Advice for Pregnant Workers

On advice from Queensland Health, pregnant workers are able to continue working at our schools and other workplaces. However, it is imperative that pregnant workers practice the preventive measure recommended to reduce the spread of influenza. It is also important that pregnant workers seek early medical treatment if they start to develop influenza like symptoms.

What happens if a student has Human Swine Influenza?

If a student is confirmed as having human swine influenza, they should be asked to stay at home until completely well, or until at least 24 hours after their fever has resolved, whichever is the longer. They should be advised to restrict close contact (within one metre) with others as much as possible, especially with any family members who are in a vulnerable group. If the student 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 their doctor.

What should a school do if a student is suspected of having Human Swine Influenza?

All students with influenza-like illness should be asked to remain at home until they are well. Routine testing of suspected cases is no longer being carried out.

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What will happen at school if a student or staff member is confirmed as having Human Swine Influenza?

There is no longer a need for all contacts of a confirmed case to stay away from school. Anyone who has flu-like symptoms should be asked to stay at home. Other action may be considered on a case by case basis, in consultation with Queensland Health.

What should Principals, TAFE Institutes and Managers do if an employee or student attends a DET workplace exhibiting flu-like symptoms?

Anyone exhibiting flu-like symptoms should be advised to go home and, if they are in a vulnerable group or their condition worsens, seek appropriate medical advice.

The parent should be asked to keep the child at home, and staff should stay at home, until completely well, or until at least 24 hours after their fever has resolved, whichever is the longer.

What should Principals, TAFE Institutes and Managers do if an employee or student report that they are being tested for Human Swine Influenza?

Advice from Queensland Health is that anyone being tested for Human Swine Influenza is to remain at home until test results are known. As such, anyone coming to a school stating they are being or have been tested should be asked to should stay at home, until completely well, or until at least 24 hours after their fever has resolved, whichever is the longer.

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 and cover their nose and mouth when they cough and sneeze.

Is a student able to return to school immediately after interstate or overseas travel?

Yes. Students returning from trips from interstate and overseas areas affected by Human Swine Influenza 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 study tours and visits to Queensland State schools be affected by the decision to move to the 'protect' phase?

No. 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 Human Swine influenza impact on homestay arrangements?

No. There are currently no restrictions in place in Queensland. Any homestay student showing signs of Human Swine Influenza should seek medical advice.

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Are there any restrictions on staff members returning to work immediately after interstate or overseas travel?

No. If a staff member returns to work and then develops flu-like symptoms, the staff member should inform the Principal, cease work and if in a vulnerable group, or their condition worsens, seek medical advice.

What is the best way to protect myself 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

Why can well staff members still attend their school to work, if their school has been closed as a result of a case of Human Swine Influenza?

It is important to understand that a decision to close a school to students does not mean that the site is unsafe or quarantined. Schools were closed to slow the spread of the outbreak because children were identified as the biggest risk of spread.

Importantly, the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff are paramount. The Department of Education and Training rely on the advice of Queensland Health as to whether staff members are safe to continue working at a school affected by Human Swine Influenza.

What can be done when a parent has been asked to take a sick student home but cannot do so for some time?

The student should be directed to the sick room and monitored. Ensure the student has access to tissues, hand washing equipment, drinking water and food. If the student's condition deteriorates, recontact the parent and inform them of the change in status. Follow routine First Aid procedures. Keep other students away from the unwell student and minimise the number of staff caring for them. Practice good infection control, including regular hand washing.

What should a principal do if a teacher refuses to teach a student with flu-like symptoms?

Importantly as mentioned above, anybody exhibiting flu-like symptoms should be advised to go home and seek appropriate medical advice. Students unable to do so straight away should be directed to the sick room or other appropriate area.

The Principal should discuss with the teacher any concerns and identify a range of strategies that can be implemented to address these concerns and ensure the educational outcomes of the student are delivered.

A student has a runny nose and is unable to blow their nose. Can staff assist them to blow their nose?

Yes. Ensure disposable gloves are worn and [Infection Control Guidelines](#), section 3 are followed.

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How can hand-washing reduce the spread of the new strain of Influenza when people are coughing and sneezing around me?

When a person with influenza coughs or sneezes the droplets containing the virus land on surfaces around the person. If you touch those 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.

If parents insist that an alcohol-based hand gel be applied, what should the school do?

Schools follow the department's [Infection Control Guidelines](#) at which refer to both the use of soap and water and alcohol-based hand gel. Parents can supply their children with alcohol-based hand gel for use in school.

Schools may consider using alcohol-based hand wash solutions in areas of your school where hand washing facilities are not readily available.

As this product is alcohol-based and highly flammable, schools should ensure adequate supervision when used with students and ensure appropriate storage when the product is not in use.

Further information can be found in the fact sheet 'Sanitising Hand Wash Solutions', located on the department's website at <http://education.qld.gov.au/health/pdfs/healthsafety/hand-wash-solutions.pdf>

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

What should a Principal do if a parent insists that their child wears a face mask at school?

The Principal should refer the parents to advice provided by Queensland Health (see response above) about the wearing of masks.

The Principal should encourage parents to teach their children good hygiene practices such as hand washing and covering their nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. Students who are unwell should not be attending school.

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