

TO: All Schools and Early Childhood Services in Otago and Southland

H1N1 Influenza A (Swine Flu) UPDATE

15 July 2009

Key Messages

- **There is now widespread community transmission of H1N1 Influenza A (swine flu) in the Otago and Southland region**
- **H1N1 Influenza A (swine flu) is very similar to normal flu: most healthy people can recover at home but it can be serious for some, especially people with health problems.**
- **Swine flu is now being managed in the community, in a manner very similar to normal influenza, through GPs and hospitals**
- **Ensure that staff and students stay home if they are unwell.**
- **Schools and early childhood services are encouraged to maintain business as usual and check the Ministry of Education website regularly.**
- **For further enquiries, please contact your Public Health Nurse (PHN). Your PHN will also contact your school at the start of term 3**
- **Please notify your Public Health Nurse if more than 30% of students are absent due to illness.**
- **Consider relaxing your usual policy on medical certificates, as they may not be available.**
- **Remind staff and students about the importance of good hand washing and covering the mouth and nose when they cough or sneeze.**
- **Students and staff returning from overseas trips can return to school unless they are unwell.**
- **Optional information sheets for parents and your staff are included with this update.**

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

What to Expect if You or Your Child has Influenza

H1N1 Influenza A (swine flu) is now widespread in the community. For most people this flu is similar to normal influenza and they recover at home without having to visit the doctor. **If you are concerned that the illness is getting worse please phone Healthline 0800 611 116** or your GP for advice. Some children need to take special care – please see below.

What To Expect With The Flu

Day 1–3: Sudden fever (temperature over 38°C), headache, muscle pain and weakness, dry cough, sore throat and sometimes stuffed nose. Some people also experience diarrhoea or vomiting.

Day 4-7: Fever and muscle aches decrease. Hoarse, dry or sore throat, cough and possible mild chest discomfort become more noticeable. You may feel tired, depressed or flat.

Day 8: Symptoms decrease. At this point you can return to school or work if you feel well enough. Cough, tiredness and mild depression may last 1–2 weeks or more.

When a Child Is Unwell

Older children and teens have the same flu symptoms as adults. Very young children and infants probably have similar symptoms, but may not know how to tell people they have sore muscles or a headache.

These children may be irritable and eat poorly. They sometimes develop a hoarse cry and barking cough (like croup). Younger children may also have diarrhoea, vomiting and stomach pain. Some of the things you can do for your child are:

- Offer cool fluids frequently when the child is awake.
- Give paracetamol for the fever in the dose recommended on the packet (unless your doctor says otherwise). Do not give aspirin-containing medications.
- Allow the child to rest and stay at home until their symptoms have been better for at least 24 hours, so the virus doesn't spread to other children.

Children who need to take special care

If your child has any of the following medical conditions, you should speak with your child's GP or specialist as soon as flu symptoms develop. Your child is likely to be prescribed antiviral drugs.

- Immune compromised or suppressed (eg cancer treatment)
- Severe or poorly controlled congestive heart failure or other significant heart disease
- Severe or poorly controlled chronic respiratory disease, including cystic fibrosis
- More severe asthma (e.g. people on oral steroids, high dose steroid inhalers, or steroids and long-acting beta-agonists)
- Renal replacement therapy

How to help limit the spread of infection

Children with influenza are infectious for longer than adults. To help limit the spread of infection,

- Use disposable tissues to wipe noses and throw all tissues away in a plastic-lined rubbish bin.
- Teach the child to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when they cough or sneeze.
- When holding small children who are sick place their chin on your shoulder so they do not cough in your face
- Wash your hands often, and teach your child to do so, especially after wiping their nose.

When to Seek Medical Attention

As with ordinary flu, it is important to seek attention if a child or adult deteriorates. Fever, headache, chills can also be early signs of other diseases, such as meningococcal disease. If simple treatments such as paracetamol, do not bring the fever down or their condition gets worse – seek urgent medical attention

Signs that may signal the need for urgent medical attention including:

- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain
- Blueness around the lips
- Inability to keep fluids down
- Sensitivity to light, sudden appearance of a rash
- Becoming less alert or developing confusion.

When to Return to School

Allow the child to rest and stay at home until their symptoms have been better for at least 24 hours, so the virus doesn't spread to other children. Some children may be unwell for about 7 days.

For more information visit the Ministry of Health website, www.moh.govt.nz or phone Healthline 0800 611 116.