

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

13th August 2009

Version 1.1

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 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 preparation for the possibility of cases of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 occurring.

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 (H1N1) 2009 by implementing good health practices now and preparing for activities that need to occur in the event of cases of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 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 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)
- Provide information to staff and students, including:
 - The symptoms of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009
 - What to do in the event of a person presenting with influenza like symptoms
 - Hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene

(available at www.hpsc.ie)

- Promote good hand hygiene and respiratory 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 carpet work
- Ensure that environmental cleaning procedures to prevent the spread of respiratory illness are in place including:
 - 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; if/when updating or repairing facilities, consider installing automatic or foot-operated taps, dryers and waste bins. Ensure that you have stocks of tissues, paper towels and soaps;
 - Consider how you might use alcohol-based hand rub (minimum 60% alcohol), for example at the entrances to rooms or sites without hand-washing facilities;
 - 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 occur in crèche/preschool or based on advice to close on public health grounds, 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
- Estimate 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
- Ensure GP contact details available for all children attending, and permission to call GP if necessary
- Up to date contact details for the local Department of Public Health

3. Preparation for actions required if the crèche/preschool suspects a child to have Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza

Crèches/preschools need to be prepared to recognise and respond if a child develops symptoms consistent with Pandemic (H1N1) 2009. This may build on policies already in place to deal with sick children.

- All staff should be able to recognise symptoms of influenza. Information is available on: www.hpsc.ie for most up to date list of symptoms of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009.
- In the event that a staff member thinks a child may have Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza, there should be a procedure in place that will include isolating the child until their parent/guardian is contacted. The parent/guardian should be advised to phone their GP/family doctor prior to attending the surgery.
- Remind parents/carers that children displaying flu-like symptoms should stay at home and remain in isolation, pending advice from the GP, or for seven days from the onset of symptoms.
- In the event that a child, who may have Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza, is not able to be collected by their parent/carer, there should be a procedure in place for contacting the GP/family doctor by phone and accommodating and caring for the child in isolation from the other children until he/she is assessed by the doctor.
- Crèches/preschools should have clear policies on exclusion of staff and children with flu-like illness. Review plans for dealing with above average absences of staff. Ensure up-to-date list of contact details of staff.
- Remind parents/carers that children displaying flu like symptoms while at home (weekends and holidays) should not return to the crèche/preschool for seven days from the onset of symptoms.

4. Actions required in there is a case of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza in a crèche/preschool

Crèches/preschools need to have an emergency plan in the event that a child or staff member is diagnosed with Pandemic (H1N1) 2009.

If the GP/family doctor diagnoses Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 in a child/staff member attending a crèche/preschool, the institution should be prepared to act on advice that may include:

- The child/staff member with Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza will be advised to stay at home for seven days from the onset of symptoms.
- The Department of Public Health may consider closure of the childcare facility if there is concern about the potential for spread of the virus, particularly if there is more than one person with Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza.
- If closure is advised alternative arrangements will be needed for care of children. These alternative arrangements should aim to have as few as possible children being cared for together in any setting.

5. Preparation for closure of a crèche/preschool

In the event of advice to close a crèche/preschool on public health grounds or because of staff absenteeism the facility must develop plans for partial and total closure. Each crèche/preschool:

- Should have a governance structure for implementation of closure.
- 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
 - 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.
- Must plan for managing staff shortages due to staff being sick or taking leave due to their own children being sick.

6. 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 precautions 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 on caring for persons at home with Pandemic (H1N1) 2009' at www.hpsc.ie).
- 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 on caring for persons at home with Pandemic (H1N1) 2009' at www.hpsc.ie

7. 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 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.