

Part 3: Advice for the public

During the PROTECT phase the public will play an important role in assisting to minimise the spread and severity of the disease through such measures as the continuation of good hand and respiratory hygiene, staying at home if unwell and being aware and alert to the fact that this disease could have a more serious impact on vulnerable groups (as outlined in Part 2.1, Table 1).

3.1 Pandemic (H1N1) 2009

Personal hygiene is crucial, as one of the main ways that influenza viruses spread from person to person is via respiratory droplets from coughs and sneezes. This can happen when droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze are propelled through the air and land on the mouth or nose of people nearby. It can also be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object or surface, and then touches their mouth or nose.

3.2 What can I do to prevent catching pandemic (H1N1) 2009?

You can prevent getting infected by avoiding close contact with people who show influenza-like symptoms (trying to maintain a distance of about 1 metre or more, if possible) and taking the following measures:

- Be vaccinated;
- Avoid touching your mouth and nose;
- Clean hands thoroughly with soap and water, or clean hands with an alcohol-based hand rub on a regular basis;
- Do not visit people who have the flu unless it is absolutely necessary;

When someone in the house has flu it is important that:

- they clean their hands regularly;
- the household environment is regularly cleaned with soap and water or detergents;
- the person with illness stays home and avoids contact with others; and
- the person with illness wears a surgical mask or other appropriate face coverings, if possible, when others are in the room, and stays at least 1 metre distant from others.

3.3 How do I know if I have pandemic (H1N1) 2009?

The symptoms of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 infections are similar to the symptoms of human seasonal influenza infection and include fever and either cough or sore throat. In addition, illness may be accompanied by other symptoms including headache, tiredness, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, diarrhoea, and vomiting. Like seasonal flu, pandemic (H1N1) 2009 infection in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe.

3.4 What should I do if I think I have pandemic (H1N1) 2009?

People who are otherwise healthy and have mild influenza symptoms are asked to undertake the following:

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- stay at home and keep away from work, school and crowded areas or public gatherings until symptoms have resolved. If medical attention is required people should consult a medical practitioner by telephone;
- avoid contact with other people where possible;
- cover nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing and, if using tissues, make sure you dispose of them carefully;
- clean hands regularly, and immediately after coughing or sneezing with soap and water or cleanse them with an alcohol-based hand rub;
- alleviate the symptoms - rest, drink plenty of fluids and use a pain reliever for aches. This is adequate for recovery in most cases. A non-aspirin pain reliever should be used by children under 18 years of age because of the risk of Reye's syndrome

3.5 When should someone seek medical care?

A person should seek medical care if they experience shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, if concerned about symptoms, or they become worse. For parents with a young child who is ill, seek medical care immediately if a child has fast or strained/laboured breathing, continuing fever or convulsions (fits / seizures).

If you have any of the following, you should definitely seek medical help.

- shortness of breath
- difficulty breathing or chest pain
- you become confused
- inability to keep liquids down because of vomiting
- you become dehydrated (dizzy when standing, passing much less urine than normal)

3.6 What to do if I'm vulnerable or have a family member who is vulnerable

If you suffer typical symptoms of influenza (fever, cough, muscle aches) and you are part of a vulnerable group (See Part 2.1 Table 1) then you should contact your doctor or the flu clinic so that you can be assessed. Your doctor may wish to perform pathology testing (a throat or nose swab) and prescribe antiviral medication. General measures to treat 'flu symptoms include rest, fluids and analgesics.

Antiviral medication is most effective if taken in the first 48 hours of flu symptoms so it is important if you are part of a vulnerable group to seek medical care early in your illness.

3.7 Attending public events

Gatherings of lots of people such as at football matches, church services and concerts will not be discouraged during the protect phase. This is because the disease is mild in most people. However there are two important considerations for people attending gatherings of large numbers of people.

1. People who are unwell with the disease should always isolate themselves from others and protect their neighbours and the community by staying away from gatherings and trying to limit the spread of the illness.
2. People who are vulnerable to serious complications of influenza (see Part 2.1 Table 1) need to reconsider their attendance at such events as contact with large numbers of people can increase the risk that they come into contact with the infection.

3.8 What about using a facemask?

If you are not sick you do not have to wear a facemask.

If you are sick, you should wear a facemask when seeking medical attention or when in close company of vulnerable people (see Part 2.1 Table 1).

A household member should wear a facemask if they need to come within one metre of an ill person who is not able to wear a mask, particularly if they are in a vulnerable group.

Wearing a facemask incorrectly or removing or disposing of it improperly can contaminate the wearer's hands, mouth or eyes with virus, possibly resulting in exposure of the wearer or others to the virus. Correct facemask use and removal includes the following steps:

- Prior to putting on a facemask, wash hands thoroughly with soap and water. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching the outside of the front face piece of the facemask during and after use to help prevent contamination of hands with infectious material that may have collected there.
- Once worn, the facemask should be removed carefully using the elastic bands or ties at the back of the head (avoid touching the face piece) and appropriately discarded in the regular waste.
- After the facemask has been removed and discarded, wash hands thoroughly with soap and water. Use an alcohol-based hand rub if soap and water are not available.

It is important to remember that there are other important steps you can take to reduce the risk of becoming infected with influenza and, if you have an influenza infection, to reduce your risk of spreading the infection to others. These measures include good hand hygiene and good cough and sneeze etiquette, which are described below.

Hand hygiene

Hand hygiene is essential in the reduction of transmission of infectious agents. Hand hygiene includes washing hands with soap and water or cleaning hands with alcohol-based products (gels, rinses, foams) that can be used without water.

If your hands are visibly dirty with respiratory secretions (phlegm, spit), you need to wash them with soap and warm water, scrubbing your wrists, palms, fingers and nails for 15-20 seconds, and then dry with a clean dry towel or paper towel.

If there is no visible dirt, you could use an alcohol-based hand rub.

In general, try to keep your hands away from your face.

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Cough and sneeze etiquette
If you cough or sneeze, you should
Cover your nose and mouth with a disposable tissue rather than your hands.
If there are no tissues available, cover your nose and mouth with your upper arm rather than your hands. Wash your upper arm (or sleeve) as soon as practical if you have sneezed or coughed into it.
Dispose of used tissues in the nearest bin.
Wash your hands afterwards or after touching used tissues.

For further information:

- Visit the Health Emergency website: <http://www.healthemergency.gov.au>
- Call the Commonwealth Health Hotline for pandemic (H1N1) 2009: Ph: 180 2007.

3.9 Infection Control in the Workplace

General Advice

During the PROTECT phase, workplaces should focus on:

- Promoting good hand, respiratory hygiene etiquette and other infection control practices. Promotional material and advice to reduce the spread of influenza is available at the 'The Flu and You' website:
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/panflu/publishing.nsf/Content/fluandyou-broch-1>
- Ensuring that materials needed for hand and respiratory hygiene are readily available in the workplace (e.g. tissues and receptacles for their disposal, soap and hand washing facilities and/or alcohol-based hand sanitisers).
- Encouraging and supporting staff members with acute respiratory illnesses to stay at home until they are well (that is until their symptoms have completely resolved).
- Encouraging visitors/customers with acute respiratory illness to stay away from the workplace until they are well (that is until their symptoms have completely resolved).
- Encouraging individuals to assess whether they are in the vulnerable category of increased risk of complications of pandemic (H1N1) 2009.

Advice for Staff Members at Increased Risk of Complications from Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 *

Part 2.1, Table 1 outlines the groups of people that are believed to be at increased risk of complications from pandemic (H1N1) 2009 infections.

Consideration should be given to deploying staff members who fall into one or more of these groups to areas where they are at less risk of exposure to those who may have the infection.

Specific advice for health care workers who are at increased risk of complications from pandemic (H1N1) 2009 is provided in Part 2.

3.10 Pandemic Vaccination

Further information about pandemic vaccination for health care workers in the PROTECT phase is available in the vaccination appendices to this document (Appendices 3-9).