

H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza)

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Questions and answers for parents and carers

Have there been any confirmed cases of H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) in Queensland?

There have now been confirmed cases of H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) in Queensland.

What is the H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza)?

The H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) virus is a new flu virus that is infecting people and spreading from person to person. Cases of H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) have been confirmed in countries throughout the world by the World Health Organization and there have now been confirmed cases of H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) in Australia.

H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) is spread from person to person in the same way seasonal influenza and other common respiratory infections spread. H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) from eating properly handled and prepared pork or pork products. ([CDC](#) and [WHO](#) fact sheets).

How is H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) transmitted?

H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) is contagious and has spread from human to human. However, at this time, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

This flu is spread from person to person in the same way seasonal influenza and other common respiratory infections spread.

Being in close contact (e.g. within a metre) with an infected person while they are talking, coughing or sneezing puts you at risk of becoming infected. Virus-containing droplets can land on the surfaces of the mouth, nose and throat of people close by. The virus may also be spread through contact with infectious respiratory secretions on the hands of an infected person or other objects and surfaces.

How long is the infectious period for H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza)?

People with H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) should be considered potentially contagious as long as they have a fever and for up to seven (7) days following the onset of illness, whichever is longer.

Children, especially younger children, may be contagious for longer periods.

What are the symptoms of H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza)?

The symptoms of swine flu are similar to those of seasonal influenza, including:

- fever and any one of the following
- cough, sore throat, runny nose or nasal congestion.

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In addition, some people have also reported diarrhoea and vomiting associated with H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza). Severe illness (pneumonia and respiratory failure) and deaths have been reported with H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) infection in people. Like seasonal flu, H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) may cause worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions.

Any people exhibiting these symptoms should go home and contact 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84) or attend their medical practice or hospital Emergency Department. If attending a medical practice or hospital Emergency Department, people should telephone beforehand so they can arrange to be seen away from other people.

Does the current Influenza vaccination (flu shot) provide any protection against H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza)?

The seasonal influenza vaccine is unlikely to offer protection against H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza). However, it is recommended that people over six (6) months old continue to be vaccinated against seasonal influenza.

What is the best way to protect myself from H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza)?

For both seasonal and H1N1 Influenza A (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
- consult your doctor if you have a cough and fever. Follow their instructions, including taking medicine as prescribed.
- if attending a medical practice or hospital Emergency Department, telephone beforehand so that they can arrange for you to be seen away from other people.

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

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>

Who should I talk to if I think have flu-like symptoms?

We encourage you to talk to your general practitioner or call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) if you have any concerns. If attending a medical practice or hospital Emergency Department, telephone beforehand so they can arrange for you to be seen away from other people. The Department of Health and Ageing has set up a Swine Influenza Hotline – 180 2007.

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What treatment is available for H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza)?

Antiviral medications such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza) can be used in the treatment of H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza). Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines which can help prevent or reduce symptoms. Antiviral drugs work best if started soon after becoming sick – within two (2) days of symptoms developing.

Antibiotics may be required for secondary bacterial infections such as pneumonia.

What tests are conducted to determine if someone has H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza)?

Testing involves a nose and throat swab which is sent away to Queensland Health's Brisbane laboratory. Any initial test results that are positive are sent to the World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre for Influenza in Victoria for confirmation.

What should I do if I have just returned from overseas?

Anyone who has been in countries of concern recently, and has become ill within seven (7) days of returning, should consult their general practitioner or hospital emergency department, especially if they have flu-like symptoms.

The list of countries of concern, which is updated regularly, is available from the Australian Government's [Department of Health and Ageing website](#).

Should a child go to school after returning from an overseas country of concern?

Students will be asked not to attend school for seven (7) days, inclusive of weekends and public holidays, following international travel to an area of concern. To the best of their ability, students should also avoid other major gatherings e.g. sporting events, shopping malls.

The list of countries of concern, which is updated regularly, is available from the Australian Government's [Department of Health and Ageing website](#).

Should a child go to school after having contact with a family member who has recently returned from a country of concern?

Yes. If the family member develops flu-like symptoms they should contact 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84) for further information.

The list of countries of concern, which is updated regularly, is available from the Australian Government's [Department of Health and Ageing website](#).

What should a parent do if their child has had contact with a child who is currently on a seven-day time out period out from school due to international travel to areas of concern?

Continue normal activities and contact 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84) if concerned.

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What will the seven-day day time out period involve?

Students will be asked not to attend school for seven (7) days following international travel to an area of concern. To the best of their ability, students should also avoid other major gatherings e.g. sporting events, shopping malls.

Why is it a seven-day timeout period?

A seven-day timeout period is a substantial disruption for students and their carers. However, it is less of a burden for families and the community than closure of an entire school which could result if a student attended school while infectious.

Can the period be shorter than seven (7) days?

No. Experts from the Communicable Diseases Network Australia recommend that seven (7) days is the period of time to ensure that the student has not acquired infection.

Will a school always be temporarily closed upon notification that there is a confirmed case of H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) at the site?

No. The decision to temporarily close a school is made by Queensland Health on a case by case basis after careful consideration of a range of information.

It is possible that a school might be temporarily closed to all students but staff may be able to continue to access this site.

Queensland Health may also determine that only those identified staff and students who have come into close contact with the confirmed case(s) might be placed into home isolation. It might be deemed appropriate by Queensland Health for all other students and staff members to continue coming to school.

I'm a parent/carer of a student who has returned from travelling to a country of concern, who do I call?

If you are unsure whether your child needs to stay home from school, you should check the list of countries of concern on the Australian Government's [Department of Health and Ageing website](#).

This list will be reviewed regularly in light of the current situation.

We encourage you to talk to your general practitioner or call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) if you have any concerns. If attending a medical practice or hospital Emergency Department, telephone beforehand so they can arrange for you to be seen away from other people. The Department of Health and Ageing has set up a Swine Influenza Hotline – 180 2007.

If schools require further information they should contact Organisational Health Unit on telephone (07) 3237 0729.

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What should I do if my child has H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza)?

If your child is confirmed as having H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) by Queensland Health, your entire household would be home isolated for seven (7) days. Antiviral medications such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza) can be used in the treatment of H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza).

What should I do if my child is suspected of having H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza)?

If your child is suspected of having H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza), the student will be home isolated until results are confirmed by Queensland Health.

What is the Government doing?

The Queensland Government is working with the Commonwealth and other state governments to manage the situation. Our public health response will continue to be reviewed in line with this. Queensland Health is also:

- monitoring for cases
- urgently testing suspect cases
- isolating all suspected cases in their homes and providing them with anti-virals
- placing nurses at the airports to meet all international flights, and has
- activated the Queensland Health Pandemic Influenza Plan
- activated the Population Health Sub-plan
- established the State Health Emergency Coordination Centre.

Do I 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. 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.

Any staff or students should stay home when they are sick.

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

Being in close contact (e.g. within a metre) with an infected person while they are talking, coughing or sneezing puts you at risk of becoming infected.

Virus-containing droplets can land on the surfaces of the mouth, nose and throat of people close by. The virus may also be spread through contact with infectious respiratory secretions on the hands of an infected person or other contaminated objects and surfaces. Hand-washing reduces the spread of the influenza virus by reducing cross contamination.

Washing your hands frequently with soap, water and drying thoroughly or the use of 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.

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Are there any groups of people who are more at risk of serious complications of H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza)?

More study is needed to determine if some populations (i.e. younger or older people; or people with other medical conditions) are at higher risk for severe illness. The World Health Organisation recommends that everyone take precautions to prevent the spread of infection. If you have any concerns please discuss with your general practitioner.

Is it safe to eat pork meat and products?

H1N1 Influenza A (Human Swine Influenza) in pigs has never been reported or detected in Australia. Pork and pig meat products are safe to eat. For more information related to animal health visit www.dpi.qld.gov.au

Will student tours and visits to Queensland State schools from affected countries observe the seven-day timeout period?

Yes. Children and adolescents from affected countries (currently Japan, USA, Canada, Mexico and Panama) will observe the seven-day timeout period. It is possible that additional countries may be added to the list of affected countries. If this occurs, the same conditions will apply.

Can students from affected countries stay in homestay arrangements?

Currently, only the child or adolescent arriving or returning from an affected country observes the timeout period. Siblings and other household members are not subject to the timeout period.

The main impact for Study Tours coming to Queensland is that students entering Australia from the affected countries will not be permitted to enter the school grounds for seven days. This is based on advice from Queensland's Chief Health Officer.