

## **Information and medical advice about Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 for people with Cystic Fibrosis (CF)**

21/08/09

Version 1.1

**Produced by Public Health Physicians, Health Service Executive and the Cystic Fibrosis Association of Ireland. This information is not intended to replace or give specific medical advice. We recommend that you contact your CF Team with medical queries.**

It is important for people with CF to learn about influenza and how to keep yourself and your family as healthy as possible.

### **What is Pandemic (H1N1) 2009?**

Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 was formerly known as Influenza A(H1N1) or Swine Flu. It is a type of flu virus. In the past this virus affected pigs, and only occasionally affected people who had close contact with pigs. The virus has now changed and can spread easily from person to person.

It is called pandemic flu because people all over the world are being infected by it. For the majority of people it is a mild disease; however some people can develop complications such as pneumonia.

In common with the general population, it is likely that many people with CF will contract swine flu. With good preparation and treatment, it is likely that people with CF will do well and recover from this, but as some are already very ill, they may experience worsening health.

### **How will I know if I have got Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza?**

You will have the same symptoms as if you had ordinary flu- they will probably be sudden, and may be severe. They may include:

- Temperature over 38°C/100.4°F and some of the following
- Dry cough
- Headache
- Severe weakness and fatigue
- Aching muscles and joints
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Vomiting / diarrhoea

These can lead to complications some of which may be severe.

## **Are there people at higher risk of complications and are people with CF likely to be affected?**

Some people are at higher risk of complications from flu. They may require additional treatment or monitoring.

These are patients with chronic lung, heart, kidney, liver, or neurological disease; immunosuppression (whether caused by disease or treatment); diabetes mellitus; people aged 65 years and older; children <5 years (children <2 years are at higher risk of severe complications); people on medication for asthma, severely obese people (Body Mass Index of 40 or greater), pregnant women and people with haemoglobinopathies.

At present swine flu seems to be affecting younger people.

Cystic Fibrosis is a chronic lung condition, which places a patient at high risk of severe influenza and its complications.

There is no evidence that infants, children or adults with CF are more likely to catch Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 than anyone else.

However, if a patient with CF catches a respiratory infection, including the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009, the impact could be greater and the outcome worse. There may be a further increased risk for people with CF if also in one other of the high-risk groups listed above.

In people with CF, influenza can lead to severe pneumonia. If you have the flu, you will develop many of the symptoms listed above.

Most likely you will feel worse than you do with your usual chest infections. It is very important to let your CF care team know if you have flu-like symptoms, as soon as possible.

## **Is there treatment for the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 infection?**

Yes. The Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus is sensitive to antiviral drugs. These medicines may reduce the severity of the illness. Treatment is most effective if started as soon as possible (ideally within 48 hours of symptom onset), but

may also be given to very sick or high risk people (like people with CF) even after 48 hours.

### **Is there a vaccine against the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus?**

Yes, there is a vaccine against Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 which is currently being tested. The vaccine should become available to Ireland and other countries in the later part of this year. It will be delivered in stages, so we will offer vaccine to high-risk people first, along with healthcare staff and other essential workers. The high-risk people will include those with CF. The HSE will carry out a major public information campaign when the vaccination programme is ready to begin.

It will involve 2 doses of the vaccine- separated by a 3-4 week interval.

### **What can people do to protect themselves from Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza?**

Preventing the spread of germs is the single most effective way to slow the spread of influenza (please see page 10 for *Respiratory Hygiene and Cough Etiquette*).

1. Wash your hands often with soap and water and especially after coughing and sneezing and before eating. Alcohol-based hand cleaners (minimum 60% alcohol) are also effective
2. Avoid unnecessary close contact with people who have influenza
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with your hands – germs spread this way
4. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and put your used tissue in a wastebasket. Then where possible, decontaminate your hands using soap and water or alcohol gel for at least 15 seconds.
5. If you have no tissues immediately available, coughing or sneezing into your arm or sleeve (**not** into your hand) is recommended.

## **How else should people with medical conditions prepare for the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus?**

### a) Vaccines:

- **It is important that when advised to get the Pandemic vaccine or the Seasonal Influenza vaccine that people with CF take them.**

People with CF are in the priority group to receive the pandemic vaccine.

There will also be guidance coming out regarding the best timing to receive the seasonal influenza vaccine.

The seasonal influenza vaccine is the influenza vaccine that is given every year against the seasonal flu. It does not protect against Pandemic (H1N1) 2009- however it will be important to take this vaccine to optimise your health and prevent seasonal influenza illness.

- Consult your doctor and make sure all your vaccinations are up-to-date, including the pneumococcal vaccine (against bacterial pneumonia caused by the *Streptococcus pneumoniae*). This type of bacterial pneumonia can be a problem particularly for immunocompromised individuals and can also cause complications for people who have the flu. It is likely that you have received this pneumococcal vaccine.
- Please note the anti-viral medications and the pandemic vaccines are different. The anti-viral medication most likely to be prescribed for people with CF is Oseltamivir (Tamiflu). This is a capsule, which is taken orally for a number of days. The vaccine will be given by injection.
- Please note that the Pandemic vaccine is different to the Seasonal influenza vaccine.

### b) Flu friends:

- Confirm a network of 'flu friends' – friends and relatives – who could help you if you fall ill. They could collect medicines and other supplies for you so you do not have to leave home and possibly spread the virus.

c) General measures:

- Ensure that you know exactly what medication you or your child is currently taking as part of routine CF care.
- Make sure you have a supply of paracetamol, a thermometer, non-perishable food items.
- Keep key telephone numbers close to hand; for example:
  - your CF Unit,
  - your GP,
  - your flu-friend(s)
  - The HSE Flu Information Line (**Freephone 1800 94 11 00**).

**What should people with CF do if they think they may have Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza?**

- **As soon as you feel flu-like symptoms contact your Cystic Fibrosis Team by phone and follow their instructions.**
- They will decide if you need testing or treatment.
- It is important that all routine care is continued i.e. physiotherapy.
- Ask your flu friend to go out for you if you need to collect medication/food etc.
- If you are advised to go to a doctor's office or to an emergency room, please telephone before you go and tell them that you think you might have Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza.
- When you are there cover your mouth and nose with a facemask or a cloth; make yourself known to staff. Do not sit in the waiting area with other patients.
- Cover your nose and mouth with disposable tissues when sneezing, coughing, wiping and blowing your nose
- Dispose of used tissues in the nearest waste bin.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, and especially after coughing and sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners (minimum 60% alcohol) are also effective.

- Take simple anti-fever medication such as paracetamol (**NB** aspirin should **NOT** be given to children under 16 years of age) and drink plenty of fluids.
- It is important to ensure that all household surfaces that are touched by hands are kept clean, especially bedside tables, surfaces in bathrooms and kitchens. Such surfaces should be wiped regularly with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.
- Because nebuliser treatments can increase coughing, these treatments should only be carried out in the sick person's room with the door closed. It is preferable if the sick person could start and stop the nebuliser treatment when no one else is in the room. If possible, allow 15 minutes before a carer returns to the room. If possible, half-open a window during the treatment. If assistance is required during the treatment, the carer should wear a surgical mask. Remember to wash hands after contact with the nebuliser and with all surfaces in the room. (see '*Guidance on caring for persons at home with Influenza A (H1N1)v*') available on <http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza/AdvicefortheGeneralPublic/File,3660,en.pdf> ).
- If you are discharged home or advised to stay at home please stay at home for seven days from onset of illness or until you fully recover (whichever is the longer) – avoid spreading infection to others. Discourage any visitors. Please read '*Guidance on caring for persons at home with Influenza A (H1N1)v*'. Website address is above.
- If you have taken the basic care steps outlined above and you start to feel worse, or you are not feeling better, you should contact your Cystic Fibrosis Team by phone.

### **When should a person get emergency medical care?**

If you are an adult, contact your CF team or your GP urgently if you notice:

- Increased shortness of breath at rest or while doing very little

- Painful or difficult breathing
- Coughing up bloody sputum
- Drowsiness, disorientation or confusion
- Starting to feel better, then developing high fever and feeling unwell again

If you are caring for a child contact your CF team or your GP urgently if you notice:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin colour
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or poorly responsive
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash.

**I'm on immunosuppressants. Am I more at risk than other people with CF from Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 infection?**

Yes. If you take immunosuppressant treatment you have a greater risk of becoming infected with any virus, including flu, and will be less able to fight it off once you have it.

**Can I take antivirals if I'm on immunosuppressants?**

Yes, it is safe for you to take antivirals.

**Should a person with CF avoid public areas such as public transport and swimming pools?**

It is not possible to avoid all contact with the virus in the community. Individuals may benefit from reduced exposure by not attending public events where there is close contact with many people and avoiding public transport where possible, but this would be a personal choice. Good respiratory hand hygiene is thought to be more important than avoiding public places.

## **Should I wear a facemask?**

### ▪ **What is a facemask?**

A facemask is a protective covering that covers the nose and mouth. It is worn to protect another person's nose and mouth from other people's cough and sneezes and helps to reduce the wearer coughing on others.

In the current situation, the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus appears to be spreading from person to person mainly by infected people coughing and sneezing. The virus spreads when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled through the air and deposited on the mouth or nose of people within approximately one metre. It settles on surfaces in the surrounding environment. Flu viruses may then spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object and then touches their own mouth or nose (or someone else's mouth or nose) before washing their hands. So unless you are standing close to someone with the virus, wearing a facemask will not make a difference.

There is no indication for using masks except:

- a. The sick person should wear a mask to reduce the risk of passing on the infection to others while in a common area of the house
- b. Caregivers should wear a mask while in the same room as the sick person to reduce the risk of getting an infection

**People need to focus on good respiratory hand hygiene and staying away from others if they are feeling unwell.**

### **What should I do if someone else (my partner/housemate/relative) catches Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 before me, should I take antivirals straight away or wait for symptoms?**

In general preventative therapy is not recommended for contacts. However, people with CF who have been in close contact with a case of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 may be offered antiviral medicines as a precautionary measure. Contact your Cystic Fibrosis Team, who will offer appropriate advice.

## **Where can I find information about Pandemic (H1N1) 2009?**

### **Telephone:**

Further information is available from the HSE Flu Information Line which is available 24 hours a day and is your primary source of information on Pandemic (H1N1) 2009:

**Freephone 1800 94 11 00**

### **Websites:**

The Health Service Executive Website will be kept updated every day with latest information and advice. Check it often:

<http://www.swineflu.ie/>

Department of Health and Children:

[www.dohc.ie](http://www.dohc.ie)

Health Protection Surveillance Centre:

<http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza>

### **Helpful Documents:**

*Influenza A (H1N1): Frequently asked questions*

<http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza/AdvicefortheGeneralPublic/FrequentlyAskedQuestions/>

*How can I prevent myself catching influenza?*

<http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza/AdvicefortheGeneralPublic/File,3662,en.pdf>

*Guidance for caring for persons at home with Influenza A(H1N1)v:*

<http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza/AdvicefortheGeneralPublic/File,3660,en.pdf>

## Respiratory Hygiene and Cough Etiquette:

### Respiratory Hygiene and Cough Etiquette



**When coughing or sneezing**

- Turn your head away from others
- Use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth



**Dispose of the tissue afterwards in a waste bin**



**Decontaminate your hands after discarding tissue using soap and water or alcohol gel for at least 15 seconds**

**These steps will help prevent the spread of all respiratory infections**

## References:

"*Swine Flu Questions and Answers*" which is produced by the Cystic Fibrosis Trust in collaboration with the clinical advisors to the Department of Health Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Programme.

[http://www.cftrust.org.uk/Swine\\_Flu\\_QAs\\_CF\\_Trust\\_23.07.09.pdf](http://www.cftrust.org.uk/Swine_Flu_QAs_CF_Trust_23.07.09.pdf)

*Guidance for caring for persons at home with Influenza (H1N1)v:*

<http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A->

[Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza/AdvicefortheGeneralPublic/File,3660,en.pdf](http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza/AdvicefortheGeneralPublic/File,3660,en.pdf)