

## **DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

### **H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Flu)**

#### **Information Sheet**

NSW Health has confirmed a small number of schools in Victoria and South Australia have been closed for seven days due to confirmed cases of human swine influenza. These decisions were taken as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of the virus.

To limit the potential exposure, NSW Health has advised the department to take steps to exclude staff or students who may have been in countries that have had community or school transmission of the virus.

Currently the countries are Mexico, USA, Canada, Japan and Panama. This list will be continually revised. School principals have been advised that, for the time being, any student who travels to, or arrives from, these countries should be excluded from school for seven days after arriving home.

This will allow time for any illness related to that travel to develop, and for prompt assessment and treatment to commence. If they remain well after seven days they can return to school.

Human swine influenza is a new strain of flu that has recently been confirmed in 41 countries around the world. This flu virus is a concern because:

- it is new, so there is no vaccine
- it seems to spread more easily than normal, seasonal flu
- while many people who get sick with this virus have a mild illness, some people get very sick and need hospital care, and some have died
- it is affecting mostly young people under the age of 30, which is unusual for flu
- there is potential for the virus to develop into a more dangerous form.

A lot of effort is going into containing the spread of the virus in our community. This is important while we wait for a vaccine to be available. A vaccine is some months away.

At this stage (and this is likely to change over coming weeks) there are five countries where the virus is spreading within the community to an extent that warrants extra precautions. These countries are Mexico, USA, Canada, Japan and Panama.

There are grounds for extra precautions to help stop the virus spreading from returned travellers returning from these countries.

The advice from NSW Health is that, for the time being, any student who travels to Mexico, USA, Canada, Japan or Panama should be excluded from school for seven days after arriving home. During these seven days, the

student should stay home whether or not they have flu symptoms. This is because a person infected with flu can spread the virus a whole day before they start to feel unwell.

During the seven days that a student is away from school, they should not attend after school activities, community events, sporting events or training, public entertainment facilities, or go to shopping malls/centres. Students should remain at home as much as possible, and away from other people.

Please contact your child's school to advise them that you are keeping your child at home for seven days as they have arrived home after travelling to one of the identified countries. The school will arrange for education materials to be available for your child for the time they are excluded from school.

Students will not be recorded as being absent from school for the exclusion period. The attendance register will record them as having an approved exemption from school.

This strategy is important and will help protect the whole community. At this stage the exclusion does not affect children at child care. This decision is based on information available so far about how this virus spreads.

For more information about these arrangements, please contact your school.

If you would like more information about swine influenza, this can be accessed on the NSW Health [website](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/swine_flu.asp) ([http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/swine\\_flu.asp](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/swine_flu.asp)) or by calling the national information line on 180 2007.

If you have recently returned from overseas and are feeling unwell with any flu-like symptoms or believe you have had contact with someone who has been confirmed as having Human Swine Influenza, please go to your closest hospital Emergency Department for assessment, or ring your general practitioner if you are from a rural area and do not have ready access to a hospital.