



Clinical Advisory

To: EMTs, Paramedics, Advanced Paramedics, Managers
c.c.: NAS Leadership Team
From: Medical Director (Document author: Lawrence Kenna)
Date: February 5th 2016
Subject: H1N1 INFLUENZA

There has been some concern among some practitioners over the circulation of the H1N1 influenza virus within the community and a number of cases which have been transported to hospital by NAS.

Influenza like illness (ILI) rates have risen from the Irish baseline rate of 11.3 per 100,000 to 88.3 per 100,000 population during the last week of January 2016 and are now above threshold levels which means that flu is actively circulating in the community. Both influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 (the strain related to the influenza outbreak in 2009) and influenza B are circulating in the community. Influenza is expected to increase over the coming weeks and circulate for at least the next 6-8 weeks.

NB: H1N1 is no more virulent than any other flu virus this year. H1N1 accounted for 32% of the circulating Influenza A in 2013/2014 and 30% of Influenza A in 2012/2013

This year's seasonal flu vaccine covers the H1N1 virus. So if you haven't received a flu vaccine yet, it is still advisable to do so. **The most effective way to prevent influenza illness and/or severe outcomes from influenza is vaccination.**

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Influenza usually presents with sudden onset of fever (pyrexia $\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$) or recent history of fever, and cough or sore throat. Other symptoms may include runny nose, limb or joint pain, headache, vomiting or diarrhoea.

What are the differences between influenza and the common cold? It can be difficult at times to distinguish between the common cold and influenza. The main difference is that the symptoms of influenza come on rapidly and are typically accompanied by muscle aches and a fever. The common cold has a more gradual onset and is associated with a runny nose and sneezing.

Symptoms	Influenza	Common Cold
Onset	Sudden	Slow
Fever	Characteristically High ($\geq 38^0\text{C}$); lasts 3-4 days	Rare
Headache	Prominent	Rare
General aches and pains	Usual, often severe	Rare
Fatigue, weakness	Can last up to 3-4 weeks	Quite mild
Extreme exhaustion	Early and prominent	Never
Runny nose	Sometimes	Common
Sneezing	Sometimes	Usual
Sore throat	Sometimes	Common
Cough	Common, can be severe	Mild to moderate, hacking cough

How can I protect myself from contracting pandemic influenza?

The basis of infection prevention and control recommendations for **all** healthcare personnel is the rigorous and consistent application of basic infection control and personal hygiene practices including adherence to hand hygiene and cough etiquette and the use of appropriate personal protective equipment.

It is imperative that you as a health care worker are familiar with hand hygiene, cough etiquette, standard, contact and droplet precautions and specific precautions for those involved in aerosol generating procedures (AGP).

What PPE should I use in dealing with patients with influenza?

The standard protective equipment is a **Mask**, but you may need additional PPE as follows:

- **Hand Hygiene**
- **Wear gloves**
- **Gown or plastic apron** (if risk of exposure to blood, body fluids or non-intact skin as per standard precautions) a full gown is only required for AGPs),
- **Goggles** (if risk of splash to face or eyes and for AGPs)
- **Face Mask or Respirator** (FFP2 or FFP3) only for AGP
- Always carry out **hand hygiene** after any procedure

Further information is available on the Health Protection and Surveillance Centre website www.hpsc.ie

Yours sincerely,

**Dr Cathal O'Donnell,
Medical Director.**