



**Circular No: 12/2009**

8 May 2009

**To: All Members**

## **Guidelines to Employers on Employment Issues Relating to the Outbreak of Influenza A (H1N1)**

1. The MEF has recommended the following measures be adopted by the employers whose employees are affected by the Influenza A (H1N1), or are in danger of contracting the Influenza A (H1N1).

**a) *Quarantine Order – In Hospital or at Home***

Employees required by the Government to be quarantined either in hospital or at home, will be deemed to be on sick leave and as such the quarantine period would be treated as hospitalization leave. Where an employee has exhausted his eligibility to paid hospitalization leave, employers are advised to exercise their discretion and compassion to grant additional hospitalization leave with pay. Such hospitalization leave is to be treated as part of the employees eligibility under their respective terms of employment, Collective Agreement or the Employment Act 1955.

**b) *Employers requesting employees to stay away from work without the quarantine order***

Where an employer requests an employee to stay away from work as a precautionary measure, especially where the employee has returned from a country affected by the Influenza A (H1N1) or has family members affected by the Influenza A (H1N1), the employer may consider the following measures:-

i) The employer may agree with the employee for the employee to take half day's annual leave while the employer make up the other half day's pay;

- ii) The employer agrees with the affected employees to pay not less than half day's pay during the specific period the employee is away from work; *and*
- iii) Employer and employees/union may by agreement make some other arrangements for the employees absence due to Influenza A (H1N1).

**c) *Employers requesting employees to work from home***

Where employees have returned from overseas or are at risk of contracting Influenza A (H1N1), and where the employer has requested the employee to work from home for a specific period as a precautionary measure, such employee should be paid his full salary during such a period.

**d) *Employees who do not wish to work on their own accord as a precautionary measure due to Influenza A (H1N1)***

For employees who choose not to work on their own accord for fear of contracting Influenza A (H1N1), employers are advised to adopt a flexible and enlightened approach by allowing employees to take their annual leave. For employees who have exhausted their annual leave, companies may consider granting unpaid leave.

**e) *Travel advisory***

Employers are advised not to require their employees to travel on non essential work matters to the countries affected by the Influenza A (H1N1). Employees should also be advised not to travel to the countries affected by the Influenza A (H1N1) outbreak for any personal reasons for the duration of the outbreak of the Influenza A (H1N1).

2. Attached herewith is a copy of the Ministry of Health Malaysia's FAQs on Influenza A (H1N1) for your further information and guidance.
3. For further clarification or advice on the above please contact MEF.

Thank you.



**Hj Shamsuddin Bardan**  
**Executive Director**



Ministry of Health Malaysia

## **INFLUENZA A (H1N1)**

### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

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#### **A. About the disease**

##### **1. What is Influenza A (H1N1) ?**

Influenza A (H1N1) is highly contagious acute respiratory disease infecting humans caused by a new virus, the result of a mutation created by the mixing of the pig, bird and human influenza virus genes.

##### **2. Where have the human cases occurred ?**

Current information reveal that the earliest cases infected with new virus was first reported in Mexico in April 2009. Subsequently cases are been reported from several other countries across the world.

For current updates of affected countries, please refer to [www.moh.gov.my](http://www.moh.gov.my) and [www.who.int](http://www.who.int).

##### **3. What are the signs and symptoms of Influenza A (H1N1)?**

Early signs of Influenza A (H1N1) are flu-like, including fever, cough, headache, muscle and joint pain, sore throat and runny nose, and sometimes vomiting or diarrhoea.

##### **4. How do people become infected with Influenza A (H1N1)?**

The spread begins when infected people cough or sneeze, infected droplets get on their hands, drop onto surfaces, or are dispersed into the air. An uninfected

person can breathe in contaminated air, or touch infected hands or surfaces, and thus be exposed.

This is known as the human to human transmission of Influenza A (H1N1)

**5. Is there any confirmation of transmission between pigs and humans at this point?**

No.

**6. What is the advice to infected persons ?**

- Seek medical attention and treatment from the nearest doctor.
- To prevent spread, infected persons should cover their mouth and nose appropriately when coughing and sneezing, and wash their hands regularly and thoroughly with soap and water;
- If you get sick with influenza, stay at home and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth since secretions from them contain the virus and can infect others
- Avoid going to crowded/public places and/or using public transport especially when you are sick or have the influenza sign and symptoms.

**7. How long can an infected person spread the Influenza A (H1N1) disease to others ?**

Person(s) with Influenza A (H1N1) virus infection should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic and possibly for up to 7 days following the onset of the illness. Children, especially the younger ones, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

**8. How can you protect yourself from getting infected with the disease?**

There is no vaccine currently available to protect against Influenza A (H1N1). However, there are certain actions that can help to reduce the spread of the virus:-

- Avoid close contact with persons who appear unwell and have fever and cough;
- Wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly and often;

- Avoid touching your face, especially your nose and mouth, with your hands to minimize infection;
- In the event of being in an affected area, avoid crowded places and stay indoors;
- Stay informed of the situation of the disease and of the appropriate measures taken to avoid being infected;
- Practice good health habits including adequate sleep, eating nutritious food and keeping physically active.

## **B. About the vaccine**

### **1. Is there a human vaccine available now to protect from Influenza A (H1N1)?**

No. Current seasonal human influenza vaccine does not provide protection from the current influenza A (H1N1) virus. It is unknown whether the seasonal vaccines can provide any cross protection to the ongoing influenza A (H1N1) virus infection in Mexico, United States of America and other affected parts of the world.

### **2. Will there be a new vaccine developed for the current infection?**

Yes, WHO is currently working towards development of such a vaccine.

### **3. How long will it take to come up with a suitable vaccine?**

According to WHO, it would take about 4 to 6 months to manufacture.

## **C. About the treatment**

### **1. What drugs are available for treatment?**

Currently the Ministry of Health Malaysia has antivirals for treatment of Influenza A (H1N1).

However, most of the previously reported Influenza A (H1N1) cases recovered fully from the disease without requiring specific medical attention with antiviral drugs.

## **2. Will the antivirals protect a person from being infected?**

The antivirals are used for treatment of a person infected with the virus. It is not a vaccine that creates immunity against the infection. Persons not exposed to the virus are advised not to take the antivirals because it would be required to consume it for a long time and since it is very potent medication can thus cause ill effects.

## **D. About travel**

### **1. Is it safe to travel?**

People should be aware that due to the highly contagious nature of the disease and its rapid spread across the world, non-essential travel by air or other means, especially to affected areas, should be postponed. If travel is essential or unavoidable, travelers and their dependents need to protect themselves appropriately.

Persons who are ill should delay travel plans and returning travelers who fall ill should seek appropriate care immediately.

However, WHO has not recommended travel restrictions related to the outbreak of Influenza A(H1N1) virus.

## **E. About levels of Pandemic Alert**

### **1. What does the current WHO pandemic alert phase 5 mean?**

According to WHO phase 5 means that the virus has caused sustained community level outbreaks in at least two countries in one WHO region. At phase 5 a pandemic is considered imminent.

### **2. What is sustained human to human transmission ?**

This occurs when three generations are involved – i.e. the virus has passed from person A to person B and then to person C.

### **3. What is the difference between a *probable case* and a *confirmed case*?**

A probable case is who shows the symptoms of influenza such as cough, fever, headache, chills and fatigue and either tests positive for type A influenza or is considered linked to another probable or confirmed case.

A confirmed case is one who tests positive in a laboratory for the influenza A (H1N1) virus.

**4. At what point does WHO consider a pandemic to have started?**

At Phase 6, as defined by the WHO pandemic preparedness guidelines. This phase is characterized by community level outbreaks in at least one other country in a different WHO region in addition to the criteria defined in Phase 5. Designation of this phase will indicate that a global pandemic is under way. The goal of recommended actions during phases 5 and 6 is to reduce the impact of the pandemic on society.

For additional information, please contact the Crisis Preparedness and Response Centre (CPRC), Ministry of Health Malaysia at 603-8881-0200 / 603-8881-0300 or email to [cprc@moh.gov.my](mailto:cprc@moh.gov.my) or visit our website [www.moh.gov.my](http://www.moh.gov.my)

(03 May 2009)