



Circular Letter 0066/2009

To
BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT OF PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND
THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEES

Vaccination Programme for All Children and School Staff Against Pandemic (H1N1) 2009

As you are aware Pandemic (H1N1) (*more commonly referred to as Swine Flu*) is a new flu virus which has been circulating worldwide since April 2009 and its incidence has been increasing steadily since then. The new flu virus can spread easily from person to person.

Individuals and sectors are actively co-operating with the Health Service Executive (HSE) for the efficient implementation of its plans to manage and prevent this public health pandemic.

The Minister for Education and Science and the Department acknowledge and are grateful to school management, particularly Principals, for implementing best practice hand and respiratory hygiene standards; and for effectively managing individual symptoms, where they have arisen in schools. Continuation of best practice within schools remains a priority and will assist with minimising the spread of this virus amongst the school and entire population.

The HSE has advised the Department that its national vaccination programme against this pandemic is next moving to prioritise all children from 5 years to 18 years inclusive. For the purpose of vaccination, there is no further prioritisation of children within this age bracket.

The HSE vaccination plans are based on projections that it will have both sufficient supplies of vaccines and personnel, so that the HSE expects to be able to commence vaccinating these children during the week of 23rd November, 2009. This vaccination phase may take until early in 2010.

While the decision to prioritise all children at this time is based on strong public health advice, HSE's logistical objective is to put in place systems that will effectively deliver the opportunity for vaccinating the greatest number of children over the shortest possible timeframe and with minimum disruption to any individual. To achieve this means deploying its resources in an efficient manner and securing the assistance and co-operation from other sectors.

The HSE has asked that schools might assist with promoting this phase of the vaccination programme by alerting parents/guardians of every pupil enrolled in a recognised school to the importance of and the opportunity to have their child(ren) vaccinated over these coming weeks. To that end the HSE will be providing your school with sufficient quantities of a 'vaccination pack' for distribution to parents/guardians *via* every pupil enrolled in your school. Included in this pack also will be a consent form for parents to complete for each child under 16 years. Children of 16 years and older may complete their own consent form. Schools are requested to alert the parents/guardians that the material has been distributed to them, *via* their child.

Against HSE's stated objective, above, and taking account of the projected availability of the vaccine, the dispersity of the population and schools and the range of school sizes, it will not be possible for the HSE to visit all schools.

As part of this phase of the national vaccination programme, all school staff are being offered vaccination against this pandemic.

HSE's Arrangements for Vaccinating All Children and School Staff

The HSE is making arrangements for the delivery of this vaccine through the following three ways:

- The HSE will determine the particular schools that they will visit to provide a vaccination programme for the pupils and staff in that school.
- In some situations the HSE may also invite pupils/staff in schools that are proximate to a school that they are directly delivering the vaccination programme in, to have their pupils/staff attend in that school for vaccination. This will only happen where it is easy to make the practical arrangements for the movement of pupils between schools and with the co-operation and agreement between the management of the schools concerned.
- The pupils/staff from all other schools will be advised to access the vaccination service at their local HSE mass vaccination clinic. The individual arrangements for these pupils will be made by their parents/guardians, who can also accompany them to the clinic.

The HSE is currently identifying the schedule of schools it envisages establishing clinics in. Given the economy of scale required for the HSE to establish a clinic, it is more likely that the HSE will identify post primary schools in the main. Where the HSE establishes a clinic in a school, the opening hours of that clinic will mirror, in as far as possible, the school day.

The practical arrangements for each school will be worked out locally by the HSE in consultation with each school. Again the Department would urge all schools to ensure that their contact details are available to their local Public Health Office. Details of the nearest local Department of Public Health can be found at www.hse.ie/eng/Find_a_Service/Public_Health

The HSE is currently finalising its plans in respect of special schools. These plans will be communicated to these schools by the HSE as part of the local plans developed for all schools in a community.

Current medical advice is that all children under 13 years will require 2 doses of the vaccine and those 13 years and over may require a second dose. The HSE is therefore initially focusing on vaccinating all children and arrangements for how the second dose will be given, to those that require it, will be advised by the HSE at a later date.

The websites of the HSE (www.hse.ie) and the Department (www.education.ie) will, as heretofore, provide any supplementary information likely to be required by schools in their management of the vaccination programme for their school population.

The Minister for Education and Science acknowledges the work undertaken by schools towards preventing and managing this national public health pandemic. The Minister strongly encourages schools to continue co-operating with the HSE on this important public health programme.

**BRIAN BROGAN
PRINCIPAL OFFICER**

18 NOVEMBER 2009.