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Co. Clare.

20th August 2009

Re: Further Updates on Influenza A (H1N1) Flu Virus

Dear -----,

A meeting of representatives from the management bodies, Department of Education and Science and the HSE took place on Wednesday, 19 August to discuss the approach to the swine flu pandemic for the education sector. Dr Kevin Kelleher, Head of Health Protection with the HSE gave a briefing on the current status of the virus and with officials from the DES, provided reassurance and practical advice to the management body representatives.

The DES advised that it intends to issue a circular letter in hard copy by Monday next, 24 August, outlining how and where to source Information on and respond to, the pandemic within schools/colleges. This circular will contain information and web links providing the most up-to-date information on the pandemic and will provide a checklist of important and useful advice for schools/colleges on what to do to reduce the spread of the pandemic.

Dr. Kevin Kelleher advised that the principle difference with this flu virus and the seasonal flu that presents year on year, is the fact that the majority of people have no resistance to this strain of influenza and the age category affected most severely is primarily those under 50 but predominately those under 30 years of age. He advised that statistically, the likelihood is such that up to 10% of any organisation should be affected by the influenza at its height, save in very exceptional circumstances.

HSE advice is to deal with this pandemic in a routine way. Unless the local Department of Public Health advise the management of a school/centre to close as a precautionary measure, the school/college should remain open. Any decision to close a school will be an exception rather than the norm and will be based on significant numbers confirmed

with Swine Flu. If clusters of swine flu emerge in an area, any decision to close will be based on public health advice.

The HSE indicated that a radio campaign is scheduled over the next number of weeks with the first two weeks focusing on children and schools. Management bodies were informed **that the most efficient and effective way of addressing this pandemic is to ensure good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette are observed in all schools/colleges etc. It was also confirmed that soap and water where available is sufficient to prevent the spread, again focusing on the proper techniques of hand washing.**

Education and awareness around all of the above are available on www.hse.ie and www.swineflu.ie. Information/promotional posters on hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette should be printed and displayed throughout educational settings.

The HSE's Dr Kelleher confirmed that the vaccination for swine flu will be licensed for use in Ireland by the end of September. An immunisation programme will be arranged to ensure that the vaccine is made available to everyone using a priority system.

Department officials also confirmed that a medical certificate will be required for all illness as is currently the norm, if any change were to be decided on this it will be communicated nationally. Current standard practice in relation to sick leave will therefore apply.

As this situation is evolving on a daily basis, you are obliged to monitor information on the Department of Education and Science and the HSE websites. In the event of changes to the information on the various source information websites, a commitment was given that the management bodies would be so notified by email so that communication with the sector could be facilitated.

Importantly, since the information may be subject to change, website information which can be readily updated and accessed will be the principle communication vehicle for keeping management bodies and respective schools, offices, colleges, centres of education, updated. Finally, as previously advised, a 24-hour **HSE Flu Information line is available on Free phone 1800 94 11 00**

Important websites:

Department of Education and Science - www.education.ie

The Health Service Executive Swine Flu website – <http://www.swineflu.ie>

Dept Health & Children – <http://www.dohc.ie>

The Health Protection Surveillance Centre – <http://www.hpsc.ie>

Other useful links include:

Department of Education and Science: *An Information Sheet for Schools, Colleges and Centres of Education on Influenza A(H1N1)v can be accessed on:*

http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/influenza_information_for_educational_establishments.pdf

Health Protection Surveillance Unit: **Guidance for crèches/preschool settings in preparing for and managing Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (Swine Flu):** This document provides interim public health guidance for crèche/preschool settings in preparing for Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza. This guidance includes recommendations on hygiene measures that should be put in place now in order to prevent the spread of respiratory illness, and planning activities that should occur in preparation for the possibility of cases of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 occurring. This can be specifically accessed on:

<http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza/EducationalandChildcaresettings/File,3890,en.pdf>

Health Protection Surveillance Unit: Frequently asked questions: Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 (Swine Flu) information for parents.

The advice is for parents of children in all educational institutions, including crèches, childcare, summer camps, schools and third level institutions. This can be specifically accessed on: <http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/EmergencyPlanning/AvianPandemicInfluenza/SwineInfluenza/EducationalandChildcaresettings/File,3900,en.pdf>.

Further information and updates will be posted on IVEA's website www.ivea.ie under a dedicated link for swine flu.

Yours sincerely,

George O'Callaghan
Chief Executive Officer