



Personal pandemic prevention for the Swiss abroad

On 11 June 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced Phase 6 of the H1N1 pandemic 2009. At that time sustained person-to-person transmission was found to be occurring in at least two of the six WHO regions. Since then, as expected, the disease has spread all over the world. The symptoms are now much better known, thanks to clinical observation, monitoring of data and experience gained in treating patients. All this information is regularly recorded and published by doctors, state health authorities and the WHO.

The FOH strategy is based on three pillars: monitoring systems, rules of hygiene and behaviour and provision of vaccination. The overriding goal of the strategy is to prevent serious cases (registering and prompt treatment of serious cases and cases in which the clinical course is likely to be serious) and to protect persons with a greater risk of complications.

Particular attention should be paid to the following points:

Vaccination against pandemic influenza (H1N1) 2009:

Vaccination is the most effective method of protection against influenza. It prepares the immune system to recognise and to fight the virus in the event of infection. This considerably reduces the danger of infection and of resultant complications for groups that are at risk. The primary goal of vaccination against pandemic influenza (H1N1) 2009 is to protect persons with a greater risk of complications:

- pregnant women (vaccination recommendation from the 2nd trimester on) and women who have just given birth;
- Persons (aged from 6 months upwards) suffering from chronic illnesses of the lungs, the heart or the kidneys or from a disorder of the immune system;
- premature children aged from 6 to 24 months of age during the influenza period;
- Vaccination is also recommended for all those who live or work with persons with a greater risk of complications (e.g. health and kindergarten workers), including the families and professional environment of babies under six months old;

Vaccination is also recommended for all persons wishing to protect themselves and those around them against the pandemic influenza (H1N1) 2009 and its complications.

For questions about the possibility of vaccination for Swiss nationals living abroad please consult the leaflet that you will find under www.eda.admin.ch → Dienstleistungen → AuslandschweizerInnen.

Tamiflu® and Relenza®:

Tamiflu® and Relenza® are two currently available and effective medicines against pandemic influenza H1N1 2009. They can inhibit the proliferation of viruses and so alleviate the symptoms or reduce the duration of the illness. This can also lessen the frequency of complications and of serious or fatal clinical courses. As these medicines influence the proliferation of viruses, it is advisable to start the therapy as soon as possible (within 24-48h after the first symptoms appear). The H1N1 viruses are resistant to other anti-viral medicines.

Warning: Experts **warn against the inappropriate use of anti-viral medicines** and advise strongly against taking them without a doctor's prescription and against ordering via the Internet. Given the relatively mild course of the illness to date, therapy and in particular prevention using anti-viral medicines does not seem to be necessary except in a few cases. The use of these medicines is indicated especially for patients with a serious clinical course and for those in risk categories. In such cases, doctors will prescribe the appropriate therapy.

If you live in a country with inadequate pandemic prevention and you have the chance to obtain Tamiflu® or Relenza® privately from a reliable source, we recommend that you do so, but if you fall ill make sure to **strictly follow your doctor's instructions.**

Travel documents:

If you live in a country where medical provision is inadequate, you are perhaps considering returning to Switzerland in the event of a pandemic as long as this is possible. Please remember that you must always have valid travel documents and plan your journey well in advance. Over the entire duration of the first wave of the pandemic, up to 25% of the population could be infected. In the event of a severe pandemic, many employees might stay at home for fear of infection. Public transport could come to a halt and the transport of goods could be slowed down or stopped. This would have a serious impact on many other areas.

Emergency supplies:

Shops' stocks can be used up quickly and fresh supplies may be subject to delays. During a pandemic you will be glad to stay at home as much as possible. So get in a supply of emergency food rations, at least for the duration of the illness, i.e. two weeks or even for the entire period of an influenza outbreak, i.e. up to eight weeks. As for the necessary items, see for example www.bwl.admin.ch → Themen → Notvorrat.

Protective material:

Regular and thorough washing of hands is one of the most important protective measures. Although the protective effect of hygiene masks has not been proven, they may in certain circumstances provide some protection when in contact with others and at least prevent wearers from infecting others. In many countries there may be shortages in supplies of hygiene masks. You should consider purchasing a sufficient supply of these masks (surgical mask Type II R/ European Standard prEN14683)!

Electricity supply:

During a pandemic there may be electricity blackouts. We recommend that you acquire reserves of matches, batteries for torches and radio, etc. If you depend on certain electrical items, you should organise an emergency electricity supply.

Water supply:

Supplies of drinking water may be interrupted or the water may be polluted. Build up a reserve of drinking water. If you can collect rainwater, you can also use this, after boiling it for between five minutes at sea level and up to twenty minutes at 4000 m.

Cash:

Your company may stop wage payments and your bank may cease operating. ADCs may stop working. Keep a reasonable amount of cash in a safe place.

Heating:

There may also be interruptions to gas and electricity supplies, and deliveries of fuel (heating oil, wood) may also be delayed. If you heat your house with gas or electricity, make sure you have emergency heating options and that you always have a sufficient supply of fuel.

Further information:

When preparing for and during a pandemic, reliable information is crucial.

- Find out about measures and recommendations by the local authorities;
- Regularly consult the web pages of the Federal Office of Health (www.bag.admin.ch) and of the World Health Organization (www.who.int);
- Ask your employer about preparations for the pandemic.

Hotline: The FOH has established a hotline. During office hours, your questions will be answered at the following number ++41 (0)31 322 21 00. Please note that the hotline **cannot answer medical questions.**

Websites: For updated information on the influenza pandemic H1N1 2009 you can consult the following websites:

- BAG-Pandemiewebseiten: www.pandemia.ch – Information for the population
- BAG-Influenzawebseiten: <http://www.bag.admin.ch/influenza/>
- WHO (World Health Organization): <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html> and general information at <http://www.who.int>.

Please note: this leaflet complements the general crisis measures and the relevant leaflets.