

June 16, 2009

**What is H1N1 flu?**

H1N1 flu is a strain of the influenza virus that usually affects pigs, but may also make people sick. It is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to those of seasonal flu. Cases of H1N1 flu have been reported in people around the world, including Canada.

Flu viruses change over time. It is difficult to say if the current outbreak will stop, or will continue. The World Health Organization (WHO) sets the pandemic alert level globally and has raised it to phase six. This means the virus has shown sustained community transmission in more than one WHO region. The pandemic level is based on the spread of the virus, not the severity of illness. Health officials continue to monitor the situation and plans for pandemic and emergency responses are ready for use.

The influenza outbreak is province wide and more cases are expected in communities across Manitoba. Although there has been an increase in the number of people with severe respiratory illness, this has been a small proportion of the people who have the flu in Manitoba in the last two months. The majority of people in Manitoba who have become ill have not required hospitalization.

**What precautions should I take?**

Manitobans are encouraged to use routine precautionary measures to prevent infections:

- Cover a cough or sneeze by coughing or sneezing into your elbow or sleeve or using a tissue to cover your nose and mouth.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Hand sanitizers are also effective.
- Limit touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Maintain your health by making healthy food choices, being physically active and getting enough sleep.

**What about protecting children?**

Children should take the same precautions as adults, including washing their hands regularly and covering their nose and mouth when coughing. Young children may need help with hand washing. Children with flu-like symptoms should stay home from school or daycare. To avoid the spread of germs, keep surfaces clean in areas where children play. If you have questions or are concerned that your child may need care, contact your health care provider or Health Links-Info Santé at 788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257.

### **What should I do if I think I have H1N1 flu?**

H1N1 flu causes symptoms similar to those of seasonal flu. As with any flu-like illness, if you develop symptoms, please do the following:

- Stay home from school or work and limit contact with others to reduce the chance of infecting them.
- Reduce the spread of germs by avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth and by washing your hands frequently.
- Contact your healthcare provider or visit your nearest healthcare centre if you are concerned that you may need advice or care, especially if your symptoms are severe or worsening (shortness of breath, dehydration, worsening fever, cough or weakness). It is important to seek prompt care if you are concerned you need it, as early intervention is important in treating severe influenza-like illness.
- You can also call Health Links–Info Santé at 788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257 (toll-free) if you need personal advice on self care or when to seek further care.

### **Should I be tested to find out if I have H1N1 flu?**

Most Manitobans who have been exposed to H1N1 will have mild symptoms or may not even know they've been sick. The province follows national guidelines on who should be tested for H1N1, so only people who are severely ill should be tested. This may help us to understand who is at greater risk of becoming more ill, while also keeping the demands on our labs manageable. Health care providers know how to diagnose and treat respiratory illnesses like H1N1 and don't need test results to begin your care.

### **What should I do if someone in my workplace has the flu?**

Being healthy and taking basic steps to prevent infections can help reduce the effects of influenza on individuals and communities.

- Take steps to maintain your health by taking care of yourself and those in your care including eating a healthy, balanced diet, avoiding cigarette smoke and other harmful substances, being active and getting enough rest and sleep. If you or someone in your care has a chronic condition, you can also get the help needed for effective care from your health-care provider.
- Cover a cough or sneeze by coughing or sneezing into your elbow or sleeve or using a tissue to cover your nose and mouth.
- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.

### **What should I do if there is a confirmed case in my child's school?**

Currently, there is no need to close schools or child care centres. Children who are feeling well do not need to stay home. Children who are ill should stay home until they feel better. Parents of ill children can contact Health Links-Info Santé at 788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257 for advice on when to seek medical attention.

### **How is H1N1 flu spread?**

It is believed that it spreads the same way as regular seasonal flu. Influenza and other respiratory infections go from person to person when germs released from coughing and sneezing enter the nose and/or throat. Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system when someone touches their mouth and/or nose.

### **Should I be wearing a face mask?**

Manitoba Health and Healthy Living and the Public Health Agency of Canada do not recommend that healthy people wear masks as they go about their daily routines. There is no evidence that wearing a mask will prevent the spread of infection in the general population. People who are in close contact with someone who is sick with flu, like doctors, nurses and caregivers at home, may be asked to wear a face mask to protect them from the virus.

### **Should I expect my health care provider to be wearing a mask?**

When in close contact with affected patients, health care providers may use added safeguards such as wearing a face mask to protect them from the virus.

### **What is being done to deal with this issue?**

All regional health authorities and the provincial government are working together to respond to this situation. While this version of the influenza virus is new, the health care system handles flu cases routinely each year. So far, the demand on the health care system has been manageable. The health care system continues to fine-tune plans for a larger response if it's needed.

### **I got my flu shot this year. Will it protect me against the H1N1 flu?**

This year's annual flu shot protects against known flu viruses. The H1N1 flu is a new virus and it is unlikely that the seasonal flu shot will protect against this new H1N1 flu

virus. The flu shot will protect against the seasonal flu, which is still circulating in Canada and other parts of the world.

### **When can I get a shot for the new H1N1 flu?**

Canada has a plan to make vaccine here if a pandemic occurs but it takes about six months to make vaccine once a new virus is identified. Enough pandemic vaccine will be produced for all Canadians.

### **What are antivirals?**

Antivirals are drugs used for early treatment of the flu. If taken soon after a person gets sick (within 48 hours), they can reduce flu symptoms, shorten the length of the illness and potentially reduce serious complications. Antivirals work by reducing a virus's ability to reproduce but they do not provide immunity from the virus.

### **If I have flu-like illness will I be given antivirals?**

The global supply of antivirals is limited and during a pandemic it is possible that stocks may be used up quickly. The current recommendation is to use antivirals to treat only the very sick, or those who are considered to be at high risk. This recommendation may change as we learn more about the new virus.

### **Are pigs in Manitoba sick with H1N1 flu?**

Manitoba veterinarians and the pork industry are constantly monitoring for new diseases. So far, there is no evidence that this new virus is circulating in Manitoba swine herds. Influenza among pigs is not unusual and is not usually fatal in swine. Flu can be spread from humans to pigs and from pigs to humans. Influenza in pigs has existed in Canada and Manitoba for a number of years.

### **Is it safe to eat pork?**

There have been no reports that the H1N1 virus has been transmitted through food. The usual food handling and cooking practices for all pork products still apply. Pork should be cooked to an internal temperature of 71°C.

### **Are people who work with pigs at risk of becoming ill with swine influenza?**

Swine producers are encouraged to maintain biosecurity measures in their barns to reduce the risk of infecting their livestock. This means people who work with pigs should protect their health by changing clothes going in and out of barns, wearing masks and

gloves, and washing their hands. Producers also work closely with veterinarians to keep their animals healthy.

For more information please visit the H1N1 flu website at [www.manitoba.ca](http://www.manitoba.ca)