

H1N1 Flu Information



November 2009

Background and Interim Guidance for Post Secondary Schools

This guidance is based on the best available scientific evidence and is subject to review and change as new information becomes available. For the most up to date information, please visit: www.manitoba.ca/flu

Introduction

This document has been developed by Manitoba Health and Healthy Living to provide advice and guidance to post-secondary and other adult learning settings including public and private colleges, universities and vocational/technical schools, about the prevention and management of the H1N1 influenza (flu) virus.

1. Influenza

Influenza is an acute respiratory disease caused by an infection with a virus. It can cause a variety of symptoms, such as fever, cough, sore throat, aches and fatigue. People usually recover from the flu without medical help.

Influenza spreads easily from person to person when the virus released from an infected person's coughing and sneezing enters the nose or throat of another person. The virus can also rest on hard surfaces for a number of hours, where it can be picked up on hands and transmitted when someone touches their mouth or nose. People are usually contagious the day before they develop symptoms and are most contagious during the first three to five days of the illness. Children and people with weakened immune systems may be contagious for a longer period of time. Not everyone who gets influenza develops symptoms but they still may be able to spread it to others, especially if they cough or sneeze.

2. H1N1 flu

H1N1 flu is a new strain of the influenza virus. It is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to those of seasonal flu. H1N1 appears to be transmitted in the same way as other influenza strains. Cases of H1N1 flu have been reported in people around the world, including Canada, which is why it is called a pandemic.

During the first wave of the flu outbreak in Manitoba, some people experienced very severe symptoms from H1N1, but this continues to represent a small proportion of the people who have the flu in Manitoba. The majority of people in Manitoba who have become ill have not required hospitalization or specific medical care.

3. Flu Symptoms

H1N1 flu is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to those of the regular seasonal flu. Typically, flu symptoms include fever and a cough that come on suddenly, and sometimes can include sore throat, muscle aches, joint pain or tiredness. Children may also feel sick to their stomach, vomit or have diarrhea, but these symptoms are not as common in adults. Elderly people, young children and people with lowered immunity may not have a fever.

4. Infection Prevention

H1N1 appears to be transmitted in the same way as other flu strains. All staff and students should follow routine measures to prevent spread of infection, including:

- **Hand Hygiene**

Staff and students should wash their hands regularly with soap and water, especially after coughing and sneezing. When soap and water are unavailable, hand sanitizers may be an acceptable alternative if hands are not visibly soiled.

- **Cough and Sneeze Etiquette**

Staff and students are encouraged to follow cough and sneeze etiquette practices including coughing into a sleeve or elbow and using tissues.

- **Cleaning**

It is recommended that frequently touched surfaces be cleaned at least twice daily. No special disinfectants or waste handling practices are needed for influenza. Regular household or commercially available cleaning products are appropriate for this purpose and waste handling should follow usual standards. All sinks in washrooms, kitchens and classrooms should be well stocked with hand washing supplies at all times (ex: soap and paper towels).

NOTE: It is not recommended that healthy people wear masks as they go about their daily routines, including going to work or school.

5. Education

- Provide students and staff with information on H1N1, symptoms to watch for and protocols for sending a student or staff member home.
- Educate staff and students on good hygiene practices, including proper hand washing and cough etiquette.
- Post signage about cough and sneeze etiquette and hand hygiene in publicly accessible areas.

6. Flu Symptoms in Students or Staff

Where possible, individuals with flu symptoms should be sent home as soon as it is safe and practical to do so. Students or staff with flu symptoms should be encouraged to stay home until they are well enough to participate in day-to-day activities. For students who reside on campus, in dormitories or other shared living accommodations:

- **Limit contact**

Individuals with flu symptoms should be advised to limit contact with others until they are well enough to participate in day-to-day activities, including attending class. Good hand hygiene and cough etiquette are recommended.

- **Accommodation**

Ideally, individuals with flu symptoms who reside in shared living accommodations, such as dormitories, should be in their own room. If accommodations must continue to be shared, individuals with flu symptoms should try to limit contact with others as much as possible.

- **Cleaning**

Frequently touched surfaces (such as bathroom taps and doorknobs) should be cleaned with household cleaners, especially after they have been touched by an individual with flu symptoms.

7. Supports

Post-secondary schools should consider providing support for those students (residing on- or off-campus) who are ill and do not have other supports available. Students should also be provided information on how to access health care if needed.

8. Psychosocial

Some individuals may react to H1N1 with fear and anxiety. In order to help people cope, organizations are encouraged to involve a wide variety of stakeholders (ex. staff, family members, volunteers) in pandemic planning, provide opportunities for regular communication, ensure that public health guidelines are shared and supported and provide information about or access to available support services (ex. help line phone numbers, Employee Assistance Programs, peer support, etc.).

9. Post-Secondary School Closure

At this time, there has been no public health reason to close post-secondary schools. Health officials assess the situation on an ongoing basis to determine the most appropriate public health interventions to best protect the health of Manitobans.

Any decision to order post-secondary school closures would involve careful consideration of the specific situation at that time, taking into account the spread and severity of the virus within Manitoba, as well as recommendations from the Public Health Agency of Canada and other jurisdictions. In the event that the public health risk is considered sufficient to warrant closing post-secondary schools, communication will come from Manitoba Advanced Education and Literacy, based on consultation with the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer and/or the regional medical officer of health.

10. For more information

For additional information on H1N1 flu, please visit: www.manitoba.ca/flu

For more information on how to care for someone with the flu, please see the fact sheet *Self Care and Influenza* or contact **Health Links-Info Santé** at **788-8200** or **1-888-315-9257** (toll-free).