

## **H1N1 FLU: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS**

### **1. What can we expect this flu season?**

Flu viruses change over time. It is difficult to accurately predict what will happen. Although there have been cases of severe illness and death associated with this virus, most individuals with H1N1 in Manitoba have recovered without specific medical care or hospitalization.

It is expected that a H1N1 flu vaccine will be available for any Canadian who wants it later this fall and this could help to limit the spread and severity of illness. However, municipalities should also prepare for higher rates of employee absenteeism and potential difficulties in providing local services. It may be necessary to reduce or even eliminate some services so that employees can be temporarily reassigned to maintain other, more critical services.

### **2. What can municipal governments do related to H1N1?**

Municipal authorities should take appropriate measures to maintain critical services, including those that support the health care sector. These may include:

- emergency services;
- water;
- waste and garbage collection;
- infrastructure maintenance, including snow removal; and
- telecommunications and fuel supplies.

Municipalities may also wish to post current public health information about H1N1 in local offices or in regular communication to citizens. Manitoba has posters and other resources available at [www.manitoba.ca/flu](http://www.manitoba.ca/flu).

### **3. What should we be doing to make sure we are ready to maintain critical services?**

Discuss your municipal emergency plan with your emergency coordinator.

It should include business continuity planning, which explains how the municipality will maintain or restore critical services if the employees that ordinarily provide these services are absent from the workplace. If any of your critical services rely on third-parties, municipal officials should ask about their business continuity plan and make alternative arrangements if there are concerns.

### **4. Should we be closing public facilities and limiting events that involve large gatherings of people?**

There is currently no public health reason to close schools, community centres or other public gathering places because H1N1 is expected to be present in all Manitoba communities. Health officials will continue to assess the situation to determine the most appropriate public health interventions to best protect the health of Manitobans. If closures or limits on public gatherings would benefit the health and well-being of the public, then such actions would be recommended and acted on by public health officials. This is a significant decision that could have far-reaching economic and social impacts that will be carefully assessed in making such a decision. As noted, to date the H1N1 flu virus has not resulted in any health reason to close schools, community centres or limit any other public gatherings.

Decisions to close facilities for other reasons – such as insufficient staff or other safety concerns – would continue to be made by the owners of these facilities and any public authorities responsible for their operation.

### **5. How can we protect the safety and health of our employees?**

The same basic precautions are still the best defense against H1N1:

- Stay home from school or work while you are ill and limit unnecessary contact with others.
- 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 of your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Contact your health-care provider or visit your nearest health-care centre if you are concerned that you may need advice or care, especially if your symptoms are severe or worsening (i.e. shortness of breath, dehydration, worsening fever, cough or weakness).

### **6. Should employees be given antiviral drugs or vaccines?**

Under current public health recommendations, antivirals are to be used for treatment of severe cases of H1N1 or individuals at high risk of severe disease and not to be prescribed as a preventative measure.

The H1N1 vaccine is expected to be ready this fall and there will be enough supply for every Manitoban who wishes to be vaccinated. The vaccine may arrive in batches, so health officials will identify people who should be prioritized for the vaccine, either because of their essential role during flu season or because they are considered to be at greater risk for severe illness.

### **7. Should employees be wearing masks?**

The use of masks by healthy individuals in non-health care settings, including workplaces, has not been shown to be effective in preventing people from getting the flu. For most healthy people, wearing a mask is not necessary or recommended.

Masks should only be worn by staff who are performing medical tasks that bring them into direct contact with patients. They are only effective if properly worn.

### **8. Who should we contact to get further H1N1 health information?**

General H1N1 health information for municipal decision-makers and all Manitobans is available at [www.manitoba.ca/flu](http://www.manitoba.ca/flu). Anyone needing personal health advice – including when to seek care – should call Health Links–Info Santé at **788-8200** or **1-888-315-9257** (toll-free).

### **9. Who should we contact to get further information or advice regarding emergency management or emergency management planning for our community?**

Your municipal emergency coordinator should be the first source of information concerning emergency management for your community. Additional information is available from your EMO Regional Emergency Manager at on the EMO website at [www.manitoba.ca/emo](http://www.manitoba.ca/emo) or call EMO at **204-945-4772** or **1-888-267-8298** (toll-free).