

H1N1 Flu Information



October 2009

Background and Interim Guidance for Child Care Programs

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 guidance to child care providers 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. The H1N1 flu virus appears to be transmitted in the same way as other influenza strains. Cases of pandemic 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 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 ache, 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 and people with lowered immunity may not have a fever. Most people recover from the flu without any problems.

4. Infection Prevention

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

- **Hand hygiene**

Staff and children 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. Young children may need help with hand washing.

- **Cough and sneeze etiquette**

Staff and children should be taught 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. However, no special disinfectants or waste handling practices are needed for influenza. Regular household or commercially available cleaning products are sufficient for this purpose and waste handling should follow usual standards. All sinks in washrooms and kitchens 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 child care.

5. Education

- Provide parents/guardians and staff with information on H1N1 flu, symptoms to watch for and protocols for sending a child or staff member home.
- Educate staff and children on good hygiene practices, including proper hand washing and cough etiquette.
- Post age appropriate signage about cough and sneeze etiquette and hand hygiene in publicly accessible areas.

6. Flu Symptoms in Children or Staff

Individuals with flu symptoms should be sent home as soon as it is safe and practical to do so.

Whenever feasible, children with flu symptoms who are waiting to be picked up should wait in an area away from others, with adequate supervision until they can go home. Good hand hygiene and cough etiquette practices are recommended.

7. Reporting to Public Health

Child care programs are asked to report unusually high absenteeism among children to the public health nurse at their community public health office. A listing of public health offices can be found at: www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html

8. Psychosocial Effects

Some adults and children 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. Child Care Facility Closure

At this time, there has been no public health reason to close child care facilities. 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 child care facility 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 child care facilities, direction will come from Manitoba Family Services and Housing, 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 information on child care programs in Manitoba, please visit:
www.direct.gov.mb.ca/cdhtml/html/internet/en/index.html

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).