

October 2009

Questions and Answers for Child Care Providers and Parents

What can we expect this flu season?

The second wave of the H1N1 flu virus is expected to begin this fall. It is difficult to accurately predict what will happen. However, during the first wave, most Manitobans who became ill with the virus did not need specific medical care or hospitalization.

The H1N1 flu shot will be available this fall and this could help to limit the spread and severity of illness. However, child care centres should also prepare for higher rates of employee and child absenteeism, and are encouraged to have their pandemic plans in place.

Will child care facilities be closed?

H1N1 is expected to be present in all Manitoba communities and in all public settings. Health officials assess the situation on an ongoing basis to determine the most appropriate ways to best protect the health of Manitobans.

Any decision to close child care facilities will be carefully considered and will depend on the specific situation. Public health will take into account the spread and severity of the virus in Manitoba, as well as recommendations from the Public Health Agency of Canada and other jurisdictions.

Any direction on child care facility closures for public health reasons will come from Manitoba Family Services and Housing, in consultation with the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer and/or regional Medical Officer of Health.

Should parents/guardians have a child care plan?

Parents/guardians are encouraged to have a back-up plan for child care. When developing a plan, parents/guardians should consider:

- child care arrangements if your child is sick and unable to attend regular child care
- child care arrangements if you are sick and require support after your child care facility's hours of operation, including a designated person(s) to pick up your children should you be unavailable
- child care arrangements if your child care provider is sick or otherwise unable to provide care

When will the H1N1 flu shot become available?

The H1N1 flu shot will be available at no charge to all Manitobans and enough vaccine has been ordered for everyone who needs or wants the shot. The first batch of vaccine will be available to Manitobans who are most at risk for severe H1N1 illness. As more vaccine arrives, the H1N1 shot will be offered to other Manitobans.

It is recommended that children younger than five should get the H1N1 shot from the first batch of vaccine, as should children of any age with chronic illnesses or weakened immune systems. Children aged five and older who are otherwise healthy should get it when later batches arrive.

Regional health authorities are actively planning H1N1 flu clinics. For more information on the H1N1 flu and flu shot clinics in your area, please call your local public health office or **Health Links-Info Santé** at **788-8200** or **1-888-315-9257**.

What precautions should I take?

Manitobans are encouraged to use routine measures to prevent infections:

- Stay home from child care, school or work if 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. Place the tissue in the garbage.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. 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.
- Limit touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Maintain your health by taking care of yourself and those in your care. This includes eating a healthy, balanced diet; avoiding cigarette smoke and other harmful substances, being active and getting enough rest and sleep.

Should I be wearing a 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, including attending child care and school or going to work.

Children or staff with flu symptoms should be sent home as soon as it is safe and practical to do so. Children with flu symptoms who are waiting to be picked up should be supervised in an area that is separate from other children until they can go home. It is also recommended that children and care providers wash their hands often and use good cough and sneeze etiquette practices.

What precautions should children take?

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 symptoms should stay home from school or child care until they feel better. 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**.

Will I be notified if there is an individual with H1N1 in my child care facility?

The H1N1 flu is expected to be present in communities throughout Manitoba and in all public settings. As with any flu, parents of children attending child care programs will not be notified about individual cases within the facility. Child care programs have been asked to establish a mechanism to report instances of unusually high absenteeism among children to the public health nurse at their local community public health office. If regional public health officials have concerns about the level of absenteeism in a child care program, they can recommend additional public health measures.

The same basic precautions are still the best defense against H1N1, including washing your hands regularly with soap and water and covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. Children who are feeling well do not need to stay home. Children who are ill should stay home until they are well enough to participate in their day-to-day activities. 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.

What if children are nervous or scared about H1N1?

While some children may become stressed or scared, others may not worry at all. Both reactions are normal. To prevent or deal with stress, talk about your own feelings clearly and calmly, provide age appropriate information and infection prevention education, encourage discussion and maintain routines.

If children display obvious signs of stress (ex: difficulty sleeping, nightmares, aggression, clinginess, withdrawal, frequently verbalized concerns) let them know that everything possible is being done to keep them safe, encourage them to express themselves (ex. through drawing pictures or talking), teach them about coping skills (ex. deep breathing, fun time with caregivers), provide additional positive interaction and, if needed, involve further supports such as caregivers, school social workers, Elders or others in the child's life. Specific information for children about H1N1 flu can be found in Information about H1N1 Flu for Children and Youth, available at www.manitoba.ca/flu.

What if I am feeling anxious or scared?

Although some adults may become very fearful about H1N1, others may not worry at all. Both reactions are normal.

To prevent or deal with stress, plan for the future but live in the present. Maintain routines, connect with friends and family, limit media consumption and take care of your health. If you are feeling particularly worried and stressed, use the skills and experiences you have used in the past to help you manage any current anxiety. Talk to others, practice breath awareness, use spiritual or personal beliefs and seek help if needed.

For more information on coping mechanisms, please see the fact sheet: *Coping with H1N1 Flu*, available at www.manitoba.ca/flu

Who is at risk for more severe illness from H1N1?

Most Manitobans who have become ill with H1N1 flu have not needed specific medical care or hospitalization. However, the following groups have been at greater risk for developing severe H1N1 illness:

- children under five
- anyone of Aboriginal ancestry
- disadvantaged populations (for example homeless)
- people living in remote or isolated areas
- people under 65 with a chronic medical condition or other risk conditions, including severe obesity, substance abuse or alcoholism
- anyone with weakened immune systems
- pregnant women

People 65 years and older and others who may be frail, have mobility problems or live alone may be at risk of severe illness from both H1N1 and seasonal flu. H1N1 and seasonal flu are likely to be in Manitoba this fall and winter. The symptoms for H1N1 and seasonal flu are similar, so it is important for all Manitobans to monitor their symptoms and seek early medical advice and treatment – particularly if they are at risk of developing serious illness for either strain of flu.

What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?

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.

When should I seek medical care?

If you or your child has flu symptoms and risks for severe illness you should visit your health care provider, because early treatment (ideally within 24 hours) may be very important.

If your flu symptoms get worse (even if you don't have risk factors) or if you don't recover as you normally would, contact your health care provider - even if you have already seen them about your illness.

Go directly to an emergency room, nursing station, or health care provider, or call 911 if you or a family member has any of the following symptoms:

- shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- severe weakness
- dehydration or no urination for 12 hours
- drowsiness or confusion
- fever in an infant under three months old

For more information on when to seek medical attention, call **Health Links-Info Santé** at **788-8200** or **1-888-315-9257**.

Where can I get more information?

For additional information on H1N1 flu, please visit: www.manitoba.ca/flu or contact your local public health nurse. 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).