

November 2009

## Questions and Answers for Post Secondary Schools

### What can we expect this flu season?

Manitoba is now in the second wave of the H1N1 flu virus and more cases of H1N1 flu are expected. It is difficult to accurately predict what will happen. However, during the first wave in the spring, most Manitobans who became ill with the virus did not need specific medical care or hospitalization.

Post Secondary schools should continue to prepare for higher rates of employee and student absenteeism, and are encouraged to have their pandemic plans in place.

### Will post secondary schools 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 post secondary schools 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.

Communication on post secondary school closures for public health reasons will come from Manitoba Advanced Education and Literacy, in consultation with the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer and/or regional medical officer of health.

### What precautions should I take?

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

- Stay home from 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.
- Limit touching of 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 going to school or work.

## **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.

## **What should I do if I think someone in my class is or has been ill?**

The likelihood of being exposed to H1N1 at a post secondary school is generally the same as it would be in any other public setting or at home. While at school, you should wash your hands regularly and follow the same basic precautions as you would in any other setting. Masks are not recommended in post secondary schools even if classmates, students or colleagues have been ill. If someone in your school has flu symptoms, they should stay home until they are well enough to take part in day-to-day activities.

If you have concerns about your school and its pandemic preparedness, speak to school administrators, call your local public health office or visit [www.manitoba.ca/flu](http://www.manitoba.ca/flu) for more information.

## **Who is at risk for more severe illness from H1N1?**

Most Manitobans who have become ill with H1N1 influenza 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.

## 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 (eg. decreased urination, increased thirst)
- 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**.

## What if I am feeling anxious or scared?

Although some adults may become very fearful about what might happen during a pandemic, 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](http://www.manitoba.ca/flu)

## Where can I get more information?

For additional information on H1N1 flu, please visit: [www.manitoba.ca/flu](http://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).