

Fact Sheet

September 2009

H1N1 Flu Virus Information for Families with School Aged Children

What is H1N1 flu virus?

H1N1 flu virus is a respiratory illness that causes fever, chills, cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, and possibly nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea just like seasonal flu (influenza).

Who is most at risk from H1N1 flu virus?

As with seasonal flu, younger children are most at risk of becoming infected likely because they wash their hands less frequently, often don't practice appropriate sneeze/cough etiquette and have more close contact with other children. Pregnant women and individuals with pre-existing chronic disease are not at an increased risk of becoming infected. However, these groups appear to be at an increased risk of more severe illness. Therefore, it is particularly important for these groups to wash their hands frequently and contact their health care provider as soon as possible if they become ill with symptoms of influenza.

How does the virus spread?

Influenza is transmitted from person to person. Coughs and sneezes release the flu virus into the air where it can be breathed in directly by others within six feet. The virus can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs where it can be picked up on hands and transmitted when a person touches their mouth or nose.

How long can someone with the flu infect someone else?

People with the flu may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. You are most infectious at the start of symptoms. Once you are well again, it is rare to pass the infection to others.

How can I stop the transmission of the flu?

Washing your hands is the single best way of preventing the spread of the flu.

Staff and students should take these steps to help stop the flu:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water for 15 to 20 seconds or clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue and wash or sanitize your hands afterwards
- If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve or arm - NOT your hands
- Don't share objects that might transmit flu such as utensils and drinking cups, musical instrument mouthpieces, water bottles etc.
- Watch for flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches and possibly vomiting or diarrhea and stay home if these appear
- Stay home if you are feeling ill
- Stay well rested, be physically active, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious food

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When should I wash my hands?

- After coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose
- After using the bathroom
- After shaking hands
- Before and after eating and/or preparing food
- When you come into contact with someone who is sick.
- Before and after using shared equipment such as computers

Teach your elementary school aged children about the importance of washing their hands by watching this video online **Lather, Rinse, Defeat Germs**
http://www.toronto.ca/health/cdc/clean_hands/clean_hands_video.htm

Can I get H1N1 flu virus from eating or preparing pork?

No. The flu virus is not found in pork products that we consume. Make sure pork is cooked through, not pink in the middle, to avoid other infections like bacteria.

Will the school be closed if there is a case of H1N1 flu virus among students or staff?

Toronto Public Health is currently advising that schools should not close if a case is identified, just as schools would not close when there are cases of seasonal flu. All regular school activities can and should continue but ill persons should stay at home.

My child has been in contact with someone who was ill with the flu. What do I do?

Influenza viruses are circulating in the community. If your child is feeling well, he or she should continue to go to school and participate in regular activities. If your child becomes ill keep them home from school until they are well.

Are there any medications available to treat this flu?

Antiviral medications are not recommended for healthy persons who have mild illness from the flu. These medications may be recommended for people who get the flu who have more severe illness or a medical condition that increases their risk of more serious complications of the flu.

How do I keep surfaces clean to prevent the spread of influenza?

Common household disinfectants will kill the virus on household items and surfaces. Mixing one teaspoon of bleach with two cups of water makes a solution that will kill the virus.

Will the annual flu shot protect me?

The regular seasonal flu shot will protect you against seasonal flu (check our website for information on upcoming flu shot clinics). This year's seasonal flu shot will not protect you against H1N1 flu virus. More information about the H1N1 flu shot will be available later in the fall.

Where can I get more information?

- Toronto Public Health <http://www.toronto.ca/health> or 416-338-7600
- Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care <http://www.health.gov.on.ca>
- TeleHealth Ontario 1-866-797-0000.
- Public Health Agency of Canada <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca> or 1-800-454-8302
- Fight flu <http://www.fightflu.ca/>
- Canadian Pediatric Society www.caringforkids.cps.ca/