

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY ISSUES

H1N1 FLU VIRUS

The WHO has recently issued a 'Stage 6' alert which declares the H1N1 Flu Virus a pandemic.

What is it?

H1N1 Flu Virus is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to those of the regular human seasonal flu.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms include fever, fatigue, lack of appetite, coughing and sore throat. Some people with H1N1 Flu Virus have also reported vomiting and diarrhea.

Is it contagious?

Yes, this virus is contagious. Since most of the people who have become ill have not been in direct contact with pigs, we know that the virus has spread from person to person.

Influenza and other respiratory infections are transmitted from person to person when germs enter the nose, throat and/or eyes. Coughs and sneezes release germs into the air where they can be breathed in by others. Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system when someone touches their mouth and/or nose.

Are all cases severe?

No. To date, the cases of H1N1 Flu Virus reported in Canada and in the United States were milder than those reported in Mexico.

Can I catch it from eating pork?

No. H1N1 Flu Virus is not transmitted through pork meat. Continue to follow proper handling and cooking procedures to reduce the risk of food borne illness.

Are there drugs that can treat the H1N1 Flu Virus?

Yes. Early research indicated that there are two prescription antiviral drugs, Tamiflu and Relenza that are effective in treating the H1N1 Flu Virus.

What can I do to protect myself from the infection?

The Public Health Agency advises Canadians to:

- ⇒ Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water, or use hand sanitizer (65% alcohol or higher)
- ⇒ Cough and sneeze into your arm or sleeve
- ⇒ Get your annual flu shot
- ⇒ Keep doing what you normally do, but stay home if sick

What precautions will healthcare workers have to take?

Note: This also applies to workers who are in contact with the general public on a daily basis.

As per normal infection control practices, healthcare workers will need to practice frequent hand washing. When in close contact with affected patients, healthcare workers will use added safeguards such as wearing masks (N95), eye protection and gloves.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the H1N1 Flu Virus a Pandemic Phase 6, what does this mean?

Pandemic Phase 6 is characterized by community level outbreaks in at least one other country in a different WHO region (not North America). Designation of this phase will indicate that a global pandemic is under way.

How is Pandemic Influenza described?

Pandemic influenza is defined as a new influenza virus that spreads easily between humans and affects a wide geographic area.

I recently travelled to an affected area and I have no symptoms of illness. Should I stay home from work?

No. Recent travelers who are symptom-free are advised to return to daily activities.

Should I avoid contact with people who have recently travelled to an affected area?

Returning travelers are being screened on arrival in Canada for early signs of illness. Those who are symptom-free are being advised to return to regular daily activities. Travelers who report symptoms associated with the H1N1 Flu Virus will be assessed and isolated, if required.

Where can I find up-to-date information?

Since H1N1 Flu Virus is a new form of influenza, we are still learning about it. For up-to-date information visit these internet sites:

Public Health Agency of Canada: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca>

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety: www.ccohs.ca

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