

May 11, 2009

H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) Information for Families with School Aged Children

What is H1N1 flu virus?

H1N1 flu virus is a respiratory illness that can cause symptoms similar to those of the regular seasonal flu (influenza). These symptoms include fever, chills, cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, and possibly nausea, vomiting, or diarrhoea.

How does the virus spread?

Influenza is transmitted from person to person. Coughs and sneezes release the flu germs into the air where they can be breathed in directly by others within six feet. Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted when a person touches their mouth or nose. People with influenza are infectious one day before they develop symptoms and up to seven days after.

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

Toronto Public Health is 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.

What measures are in place to protect my child?

Students and staff who become infected with H1N1 influenza are being asked to stay home until their symptoms are gone for 24 hours, or for seven days following the start of illness, whichever is longer. This will prevent transmission of the virus to other students and staff.

How can I stop the transmission of the H1N1 virus?

Staff and students can take these steps to prevent illness:

1. Wash or sanitize your hands frequently
2. Cough or sneeze into a tissue and wash or sanitize your hands afterwards
3. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve or arm - NOT your hands
4. Don't share objects that might transmit flu such as utensils and drinking cups, musical instrument mouthpieces, water bottles etc.
5. Watch for flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches and possibly vomiting or diarrhoea.
6. Stay home if you are feeling ill.

Hands should be washed:

- after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose
- after using the bathroom
- after shaking hands
- before eating and/or preparing food
- before touching your face
- when you or someone you come into contact with is sick.

My child is well and has just returned from Mexico. What should they do?

Students and staff who are well should continue to attend school. Anyone exhibiting symptoms of illness should stay home until they are well. If their illness becomes more severe they should contact their health care provider.

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

If your child is feeling well, he or she should continue to go to school and participate in regular activities. Watch for signs of the flu up to seven days after they have been in contact with an infected person and if they become 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.

Should students wear masks at school?

No. Toronto Public Health is following guidelines from the Public Health Agency of Canada and does not recommend that members of the general public wear masks at this time.

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

The virus can live outside the body on hard surfaces for up to 48 hours. 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 flu shot I got this year protect me?

There are many types of influenza viruses. It is unlikely that the seasonal flu shot will provide protection against this H1N1 flu virus (human swine influenza).

Where can I get more information?

You can call Toronto Public Health at 416-338-7600 or visit our web site at www.toronto.ca/health

The Ministry of Long-Term Care has additional information at: http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/updates/archives/hu_09/swine_flu.html and for information on symptoms and signs of illness at TeleHealth Ontario - 1-866-797-000.

and the Public Health Agency of Canada has information here: http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine_200904-eng.php and at 1-800-454-8302.