



# H1N1 Flu Virus: Information for Families with Children in School and Day Care



The Perth District Health Unit and Huron County Health Unit are working closely with the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Public Health Agency of Canada to monitor the current outbreak of the H1N1 flu virus.

## What is the H1N1 flu virus?

The H1N1 flu virus is a new strain of influenza. The information we have on the virus is changing as scientists learn more about it. We do know that this virus is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to those of seasonal flu. The symptoms may include fever, fatigue, lack of appetite, coughing and sore throat. Some people with this virus have also reported vomiting and diarrhea.

## How does the virus spread between people?

Influenza spreads person-to-person via the respiratory route. Coughs and sneezes release the 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 survive for up to 48 hours and be picked up on hands.

General infection control practices, such as washing hands, coughing or sneezing into your arm, and staying home when ill, can help to reduce the spread of most viruses, including flu.

## What kind of flu season can we expect this fall?

This year is a different flu season. In the fall and winter there will be two types of flu viruses circulating – seasonal flu viruses and the new H1N1 flu virus.

There are two different flu vaccines for these viruses. The seasonal flu shot will be available as usual in the fall, while the H1N1 flu shot will be made available later in the year.

## I think my child has been in contact with someone who was ill with this flu virus.

### What do I do?

If your child is feeling well, he or she can continue to attend school, day care and regular activities. There is no need to put your child under “quarantine”. If your child does become ill, your child should stay home from school or day care until feeling better and they do not have a fever.

## How can I and my family avoid getting seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu virus?

- Wash your hands well and often. If your hands are not visibly dirty, you can use a hand sanitizer.
- Cough and sneeze into your upper sleeve or arm rather than your hands.
- Stay home when you are sick until you are feeling better and do not have a fever.
- Avoid touching your face as much as possible.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces often, such as doorknobs and counters, if someone in the home is sick.
- Avoid close physical contact with sick people.
- It is not necessary to wear a mask in public places.
- Get the seasonal flu shot in the fall and the H1N1 vaccine when it is available later in the year.

FACT SHEET

### **Are there any medications that prevent or treat this flu?**

Antiviral medications may be recommended by a health care provider for treatment of certain persons diagnosed with this virus. Antiviral medications are not recommended for people or children who do not have any symptoms of illness. Antibiotics are not effective against flu.

### **Will schools and day cares be closed to help stop the spread of the H1N1 flu virus?**

At this stage, there is no plan to close schools or day cares as a control measure for the H1N1 flu virus. If this position were to change, the Health Unit would notify schools and parents.

### **Will I know if there is a case of H1N1 flu virus in my child's school or day care?**

No. At this time, the Health Unit does not plan on letting schools and school boards or day cares know if there is a case/s of H1N1 flu virus in their school. As with seasonal flu, once the virus is present in the area it can be acquired anywhere in the community. Therefore, reporting cases in individual schools is not necessary. The best way people can protect themselves from seasonal and H1N1 flu is to be diligent about taking infection control precautions (i.e. washing hands). As with seasonal flu, schools will be reporting absenteeism rates to the health unit and the health unit will respond to outbreaks as necessary.

### **Should I keep my healthy child home from school or day care during flu season?**

No. Children who are healthy are expected to go to school. There is no reason to keep children at home. Do remind them to wash their hands well and often and cover their coughs and sneezes.

### **Should students wear masks at school?**

There is no health reason for wearing masks in public, at school, or at work to avoid getting sick or spreading illness. Evidence shows that this is not an effective public health measure.

### **What measures are caretakers taking to disinfect schools?**

Caretakers will continue to provide thorough and effective cleaning and disinfecting of schools as part of their routine duties. They are being encouraged to frequently clean surfaces and commonly touched items, such as doorknobs.

### **What is being done to protect my child at school?**

A staff or student who has flu-like symptoms (confirmed or suspect H1N1 or seasonal flu) will have been advised to stay home from school or day care until they are feeling better and do not have a fever. This will help prevent the spread to other students. It is recommended that staff and students take these steps to protect themselves from illness:

- Wash hands often with soap and water;
- Sneeze and cough into the upper arm;
- Stay at home if feeling sick;
- See their family doctor if experiencing severe influenza-like symptoms.

Schools will be following their usual practises, which include:

- sending children who are sick home and advising them to stay home until well and fever free;
- reminding students of the importance of regular, thorough hand washing and good personal hygiene; and
- encouraging students to avoid sharing food, beverages and other personal items.

## Is there a vaccine to protect against the H1N1 flu virus?

Yes, there will be a separate vaccine to protect against the H1N1 flu virus. This year will be a unique flu season. Children and adults will be encouraged to get a seasonal flu shot *and* the H1N1 flu shot. The seasonal flu shot will protect against the flu viruses that typically circulate in the winter. It will be available at community clinics and doctors' offices throughout the fall.

The H1N1 vaccine will protect only against the H1N1 flu virus. The H1N1 vaccine is expected to be ready in late November. The Health Unit will keep the public informed as soon as it becomes available.

## What is the difference between the flu and a cold?

Cold or Flu?		
How do you know if you have a cold or the flu? Here are symptoms of the two illnesses		
SYMPTOM	COLD	FLU
Fever	Rare	Usually high, sudden onset Lasts 3 - 4 days
Headache	Rare	Frequent
Aches & Pains	Slight	Usual, often quite severe
Weakness	Rare / Mild	Moderate to extreme Can last up to one month
Bedridden	Rarely	Frequently
Sniffles	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Usual	Sometimes
Sore Throat	Common	Sometimes
Cough	Sometimes Mild to Moderate	Usual can become severe
Complications	Sinus or Ear Infection	Pneumonia, kidney failure heart failure, can be life threatening

### How can I get more information?

#### Perth County

Call Health Line at 519-271-7600 ext 267. Monday to Friday, 8:30am – 4:30pm. [www.pdhu.on.ca](http://www.pdhu.on.ca)

#### Huron County

Call 519-482-3416. Monday to Friday, 8:30am – 4:30pm. [www.huroncounty.ca/health](http://www.huroncounty.ca/health)

#### Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

Telehealth: General health advice from a Registered Nurse. Call 1-866-797-0000.

TTY : 1-866-797-0007. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [www.health.gov.on.ca](http://www.health.gov.on.ca)

Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca)