

H1N1 Flu Virus Questions and Answers for Schools and Child Care Centres

What is the H1N1 flu virus?

The H1N1 flu virus is a respiratory (breathing) illness that causes symptoms similar to those of the regular seasonal flu. They include fever, cough, sore throat, fatigue, and muscle aches. Some people may also have vomiting and diarrhea. The H1N1 flu virus has appeared around the world, and the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared it a pandemic influenza virus.

How contagious is this virus?

The H1N1 flu virus spreads like seasonal flu. When infected people cough or sneeze, droplets are released into the air. If other people are close by (within 2 metres or 6 feet), they may breathe in the droplets, which can lead to infection. People may also get infected by touching droplets on a person's hands or droplets that may have landed on hard surfaces such as door knobs, and then touching their eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands.

Why are people worried about the H1N1 flu virus?

Since the H1N1 flu virus is a new type of virus, most people don't have the immunity to fight it. This means that more people could get infected compared to an average year.

Will schools be closed if many students, staff members or volunteers have the H1N1 flu?

The H1N1 flu virus is circulating in our communities; therefore, closing schools is not an effective way to control the spread of the virus. Even when not in school, students may still be at risk of getting the virus by spending time in close proximity in malls or movie theatres.

Should school staff who are pregnant stay home to reduce the risk of being infected with the H1N1 flu virus?

No. School staff should only stay home if they are feeling sick. To reduce their risk of getting or spreading the H1N1 flu virus, pregnant women should follow infection prevention practices such as washing their hands, coughing into their sleeve or a tissue, staying home when ill, and getting their seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines.

When will the H1N1 flu vaccine be available?

There will be two different flu vaccines available this fall – the seasonal flu vaccine and the pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine. The seasonal flu vaccine will protect only against the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu vaccine will offer protection against the H1N1 flu virus.

The H1N1 flu vaccine is currently being developed and will be available later in the fall or early winter. This vaccine is different from the seasonal flu vaccine and will be administered separately.

The Region of Peel is planning for mass immunization clinics to administer the H1N1 vaccine. More information about the clinics and how to get the H1N1 vaccine will be available later in the fall.

The seasonal flu vaccine should be available beginning in October through the same routes as it has been in the past such as doctors' offices, a workplace or community-based health service or a Peel Public Health clinic. More information on the seasonal flu vaccine and clinics is available at www.peelregion.ca/flu

What can I do to stay healthy?

- Wash your hands often, for at least 15 seconds, with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Wash your hands after:
 - coming in contact with people who are sick
 - handling soiled tissues
 - using the washroom
 - touching surfaces such as door knobs and hand rails.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue (or your sleeve) instead of into your hands.
- Clean common surfaces such as keyboards, door knobs and counters frequently.
- Do not share objects that have been in other people's mouths such as toothbrushes, drinks, unwashed utensils.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth as much as possible.
- Talk to your health care provider about seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines.
- Stay home if you are sick:
 - The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care advises people to stay home until they no longer have a fever and are feeling better.

Where can I get more information?

Visit these websites:

- Peel Public Health: www.peelregion.ca/health/
- Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca
- Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care: www.health.gov.on.ca
- World Health Organization: www.who.int

You can also contact Peel Public Health from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 905-799-7700. Caledon residents can call toll free at 905-584-2216.

Sources:

1. Simcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit. H1N1 Flu Virus (human swine flu) Q and A for Families with School Aged Children.
2. Halton Region Health Department. H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) Q and A for Families with School Aged Children.
3. Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. (May 19 2009). Guidance for Management of Patients with Influenza-like Illness (ILI) in Ambulatory Settings.
4. Public Health Agency of Canada. (Aug. 7, 2009) H1N1 Flu Virus