

Updated November 30, 2009

What is the H1N1 Flu Virus?

H1N1 Flu Virus is a respiratory disease caused by a novel type A influenza virus. Because this is a new virus, few people have developed immunity to it, so we can expect a large number of people to become infected through the winter flu season. Most people experience mild illness and recover on their own at home without the need for doctor visits or antiviral medication. A small number of people have had more serious illness or died, but most of those had underlying medical conditions. Information from around the world shows that the virus seems to have affected younger populations more than older age groups.

What are the symptoms of H1N1 Flu Virus?

The symptoms of H1N1 Flu Virus are similar to seasonal influenza infection. They include:

- Sudden onset of respiratory illness with **fever, cough**, headache, general aches and fatigue. Other symptoms include: runny nose, sore throat, nausea and in some cases vomiting and diarrhea.
- Some people with underlying health conditions are more at risk of more serious illness and complications. These include: adults and children with respiratory disease, asthma, pneumonia, heart disease, liver disease or blood disorders.
- Some pregnant women have also had more serious illness when they contracted H1N1 Flu Virus.

How is H1N1 Flu Virus transmitted?

- The H1N1 Flu Virus is spread from person to person, usually through respiratory droplets from someone who is coughing or sneezing.
- The virus can also be transmitted by touching contaminated surfaces such as counters and doorknobs and then touching your eyes, mouth and nose. Keep these surfaces clean by using regular household cleaning products.

How is H1N1 Flu Virus diagnosed?

- Most people with mild illness do not need a test.
- Where required, your doctor will arrange for nasal swabs – this is most likely in people with serious illness. Specimens need to be collected within the first 2-3 days of symptoms.

What to do if you or your child gets sick:

- As with any illness, stay home and avoid contact with others to keep from spreading the virus.
- It's advised you stay home until your symptoms have resolved and you're able to fully participate in daily activities, like going to work or school.
- If symptoms worsen, contact HealthLinkBC by dialing 8-1-1 (available 24 hours a day, seven days a week) or call your doctor. Please call your doctor before arriving at his/her office.
- Visit the hospital Emergency Department only for emergencies.

When should I get further medical advice?

- Most people are starting to improve within 3 – 4 days of symptom onset and have recovered within a week. Coughing can continue for longer.
- Symptoms which may require further medical advice include: difficulty breathing, chest pain, a high temperature, drowsiness, severe vomiting, or a cough with blood or green phlegm.

Other signs to look for and get further medical advice on:

- start to feel better, then get worse
- high temperature (greater than 38°C) that doesn't respond to medication
- chills or severe shaking
- difficulty breathing or chest pain
- purple or blue discoloration of the lips
- less responsive than normal, unusually quiet, or confusion
- vomiting and unable to keep liquids down
- signs of dehydration, such as dizziness when standing, not urinating, and in infants, a lack of tears when they cry
- seizures or convulsions

Are masks effective in preventing the spread of the H1N1 Flu Virus?

- Surgical masks are best worn by those who are sick, to prevent the spread of virus.
- Wearing surgical masks does not necessarily provide protection for those who are healthy.
- Health professionals should follow recommended infection protection and control guidelines in their workplace.

For more information on the H1N1 Flu Virus, visit the Interior Health website at:
<http://www.interiorhealth.ca/H1N1.aspx>

Treatment:

- Most Canadian cases of H1N1 Flu Virus have been relatively mild and people get better on their own at home by following standard treatment for influenza symptoms.
- Drink plenty of fluids and get plenty of rest.
- Use antifever medication (e.g., acetaminophen, ibuprofen) recommended by your doctor to control high temperatures. Aspirin should not be used for children.
- Antivirals, including Tamiflu, can be used to treat influenza. They are most useful for those with severe illness **and** when started within 48 hours of symptom onset. Influenza outbreaks in a confined setting, such as a residential care facility, may require use of Tamiflu for prophylactic / preventative measure but will be coordinated by the Medical Health Officer.

Precautions:

Here are six simple, good hygiene practices that can help keep you healthy and reduce the spread of infection:

1. **Stay home when you are sick or have influenza symptoms.** Get plenty of rest and check with a healthcare provider as needed.
2. **Where possible, avoid close contact with people who are sick.** If you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick.
3. **Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and throw the tissue away immediately.** It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
4. **Wash and dry your hands – frequently and thoroughly to help protect you from getting sick.** When soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers.
5. **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.** You can become ill by touching a surface contaminated with germs and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Keep hard surfaces clean – use regular household cleaning products.
6. **Practice other good health habits.** Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage stress, drink plenty of fluids, eat nutritious foods, and avoid smoking, which may increase the risk of serious consequences if you do contract the flu.

H1N1 Flu Vaccine Information:

The H1N1 Flu vaccine is now available at Public Health mass clinics, some doctor's offices and some pharmacies. Enough vaccine has been ordered, so that all British Columbians who need and want the H1N1 vaccine will be able to receive at least one dose before Christmas. For adults, one dose of the vaccine is sufficient. For healthy children 3-9 years old, one half-dose is sufficient.

The guidelines recommend — those who will benefit most from immunization and those who care for them include:

- People under 65 with chronic conditions
- Pregnant women
- Children 6 months to less than 5 years of age
- Persons residing in remote and isolated settings or communities
- Healthcare workers involved in pandemic response or the delivery of essential healthcare services
- Household contacts and care providers of persons at high risk who cannot be immunized or may not respond to vaccines
- Populations otherwise identified as high risk

Others who would benefit from immunization include:

- Children 5 to 18 (inclusive) years of age
- First responders
- Poultry and swine workers
- Adults 19 to 64 (inclusive) years of age
- Adults 65 years of age and over

How can I find out if there's a flu clinic in my area?

Every Wednesday, the Interior Health website is updated with the following week's clinics. You can find it by logging on to: <http://www.interiorhealth.ca/index.aspx>

Does the seasonal flu shot provide protection against the H1N1 Flu Virus?

Seasonal flu immunization **does not** provide protection against the H1N1 Flu Virus. The viruses are different, so therefore, the vaccines must be different.

I think I've had H1N1, should I still be vaccinated?

The symptoms of influenza are similar to those of other viruses. Unless you have had a lab-confirmed case of H1N1 (nasal swab taken by physician), it's recommended that you be vaccinated.

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<http://www.interiorhealth.ca/H1N1.aspx>