

General Questions and Answers Concerning H1N1

What is influenza (flu)?

The flu is a respiratory illness (e.g. nose, throat, and lungs) caused by the influenza virus. Most flu outbreaks happen in late fall and during the winter.

What is H1N1 (human swine flu)?

H1N1 influenza virus is a strain of the flu virus that usually affects pigs, but may also make humans ill. It is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to those of regular human seasonal flu.

What are the symptoms of the H1N1 Flu Virus?

Almost always:

- Sudden onset of fever (e.g. body temperature above 38°C or 100.4°F) **and** cough

Common:

- Headache, Fatigue, Muscle aches, Lack of appetite, Runny nose, or Eye pain

Sometimes:

- Vomiting and/or diarrhea

What we are generally seeing in Canada with H1N1 is similar to typical seasonal influenza. The illness has been described as modest. Most people with influenza recover completely in 1-2 weeks; however the severity of illness can vary. A person who is concerned about their health or wellbeing should contact a health care practitioner to discuss their personal circumstances. Go to this link to review the differences between the symptoms of the flu and the common cold. <http://resources.cpha.ca/CCIAP/data/176e.pdf>

How is the influenza virus spread?

The influenza virus is spread primarily from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people infected with the influenza virus. Some people may also become infected by touching something with flu virus on it, such as counters, doorknobs, and keyboards and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth.

How can I reduce the risk of getting the flu virus or spreading the virus to others? It is important to follow these simple steps to minimize the spread of the influenza virus and to keep the university community healthy:

- **Practice good hygiene.** Wash hands frequently with soap and water, especially after coughing, sneezing, or contacting high-touch surfaces (e.g. doorknobs, elevator buttons, tables, and keyboards).
- **Practice respiratory etiquette.** Use a tissue when coughing or sneezing to prevent the spread of respiratory droplets as this is the main way that flu is spread from person to person. If a tissue is not available then cough or sneeze into your elbow or shoulder, not your hands.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.** The flu virus is spread this way.
- **Self-isolate (stay home) if sick with flu like symptoms.** Remain home, except to seek medical care, for 7 days from the onset of symptoms.

- **Stay away** from social gatherings (e.g. concerts, sporting events, or hanging out with friends) if sick with flu like symptoms.

What should I do if I think I am sick with the flu?

- Stay home for 7 days from the onset your symptoms
- Get plenty of rest
- Drink fluids such as water, broth, juice, or sports drinks to avoid dehydration
- Cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. Clean hands with soap and water
- Avoid close contact with others – Do not go to work or school while ill
- You may take medications for symptom relief as needed for fever and pain such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin).
- **Do not** give acetylsalicylic acid (Aspirin) to children or teenagers with the flu; this can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye’s syndrome.
- Also remember you can always call Health Link BC at **811** if you have questions.

When should I see a doctor about my flu?

- If you are pregnant, have an underlying medical condition, or have a child less than 2 years of age contact a doctor as you may need a medication called Tamiflu. This medication is best taken within 48 hours of the onset of flu symptoms.

When should I seek emergency medical care related to the flu?

Get medical care right away if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest
- Have persistent vomiting and unable to keep liquids down
- Flu-like symptoms improve and then return with fever and worse cough

How can I reduce the spread of the flu at home?

- Keep the person ill with the flu in a room separate from the common areas of the house, apartment, or the dorms. Keep the sickroom door closed.
- All persons in the household should clean their hands frequently with soap and water, including after every contact with the sick person or the person’s room or bathroom.
- Have a friend or family member pick up comfort items such as Kleenex, juice, medications, popsicles, etc. Do not go to the store to get these items yourself.
- Clean common areas (bathroom and kitchen counters) or high-touch surfaces (bedside table) frequently with regular household cleaners.

What about pregnancy and the H1N1 flu virus?

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/h1n1/pregnancy-grossesse-eng.php>

Should I take extra safety precautions like wearing a surgical mask to avoid catching the H1N1 flu virus?

The Public Health Agency of Canada and the Center for Disease Control **do not** recommend that members of the general public wear surgical masks to prevent catching the H1N1 virus. The research shows that wearing a mask is not effective in preventing transmission of the virus in the general public. In fact, if a surgical mask is worn in correctly or used inappropriately that it could actually increase the risk of getting infected by the H1N1 virus. In addition, masks do not act as an effective barrier against disease when they are worn for extended periods of time. The best approach to reduce spreading the virus is to continue using the prevention strategies such as: hand washing, respiratory etiquette, and staying home when ill.

Is there any circumstance when wearing a surgical mask would be appropriate or advisable?

Yes. A surgical mask is appropriate to protect those in close contact with a person with H1N1 influenza, like nurses, doctors, and caregivers at home. In this situation it is recommended that the person ill with H1N1 flu wear the surgical mask, if tolerable, during period of close contact with a caregiver. See guidelines for how to use a surgical mask appropriately. If the ill individual is unable to tolerate wearing a surgical mask then have the ill individual hold a tissue over his or her mouth and nose while receiving care or the caregiver may wear a surgical mask while providing care to an ill individual.

How to Use a Surgical Mask Correctly

- Place mask carefully over mouth and nose (**both must be covered**) and tie securely to minimize **any** gaps between the face and the mask
- While in use, avoid touching the mask, because this will decrease the effectiveness of the mask
- Whenever you touch a used mask (e.g. removing the mask) wash hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Replace a damp/humid mask with a new clean dry mask as soon as possible. A damp mask is not longer effective
- Dispose the used mask immediately upon removal
- **DO NOT** re-use masks

Remember using a mask incorrectly may actually increase the risk of transmission rather than reduce it if the mask is not used correctly.

Where can I get more information on H1N1?

- Health Link BC - **811** (available 24/7) – For hearing impaired individuals the number is 711

Online:

- Public Health Agency of Canada – fightflu.ca
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/h1n1/index-eng.php>
- British Columbia Center for Disease Control (BCCDC)
<http://www.bccdc.ca/default.htm>
- Interior Health Authority (IHA)
<http://www.interiorhealth.ca/health-and-safety.aspx?id=9024>
- TRU Webpage
http://www.tru.ca/hsafety/swine_influenza.html
- Center for Disease Control (CDC) – good resource but is US based – Often the Canadian situation is different than what is happening in the United States consequently protocols and guidance information may be different between the two countries – It is always best to use a local source of information (e.g. Interior Health Authority) to understand what is happening in our community with H1N1.
<http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1FLU/>