

Pandemic H1N1 Flu Prevention and Management

Guidance – September 16, 2009



Saskatchewan
Ministry of
Health

For Child Care Settings and Schools K-12

The pandemic H1N1 influenza virus continues to be active at a low level. Disease activity may increase over the fall.

H1N1 characteristics

- **Influenza-like illness (ILI):** acute onset of fever and cough and one or more of: sore throat, muscle aches, joint pain, or weakness. Vomiting/diarrhea may be present and fever may not be prominent.
- **Transmission:** *directly* from person to person through coughing or sneezing, and *indirectly* from touching contaminated surfaces and objects and then touching the eyes/nose/mouth.
- **Severity:** ranges from mild to severe. Most H1N1 illness to date has been relatively mild. It appears to be more severe mainly in *vulnerable groups* with underlying illnesses including chronic lung diseases, heart disease, diabetes, asthma, immune deficiency, and in the 2nd and 3rd trimester of pregnancy.
- **Contagious:** transmission is most likely to occur during the first few days of obvious ILI illness. It is recommended that persons who are ill with ILI symptoms should stay home from work or school and limit contact with others and not return to routine activities outside the home until they are symptom free.

Widespread school closures are not recommended. Decisions about school closures will be assessed individually between local authorities and public health officials.

NOTE: Schools reporting 10% or greater absenteeism should contact the Medical Health Office from their health region through their school division director.

Schools and child care programs offer very controlled environments and have the ability to implement measures that can limit transmission of the virus and to identify influenza activity. Communication and age appropriate education for parents/guardians, students, children and staff plays a major role in controlling the spread of illness. EVERYONE has a part to play.

NOTE: It is recommended that all staff receive training, appropriate to duties, on infection prevention and control

Early identification of influenza-like illness (ILI)

- Provide basic information on how to recognize symptoms of ILI to all parents/guardians, children, students and staff www.fightflu.ca/sym-eng.html
- Establish mechanisms for parents/guardians and staff to report and monitor child/student illness rates i.e. a dedicated phone line and log book.
- Encourage staff to monitor children/students and self, and parents/guardians to monitor child daily for ILI and report immediately if symptoms develop.
- Advise parents/guardians about the need for rapid medical assessment of children with underlying medical conditions, who might be at greater risk for complications from influenza.

Isolation of anyone with influenza-like illness (ILI)

- Face masks are not recommended. If masks are used, the person wearing it should be trained to use it properly. Improper mask use can increase the risk for transmission.
- Have protocols in place to notify parents/guardians if their child becomes ill with ILI during the day. Be prepared to promptly isolate those who become ill in a room/area separate from others with adequate supervision until the parent/guardian can pick them up. If there is no other option but for the child to ride a school bus, it is recommended that staff ensure the child sits on a seat by him/herself and is able to cover his/her mouth/nose with a tissue.
- Anyone with ILI symptoms should be encouraged to self-isolate at home and limit contact with others until symptoms resolve.
- Provide parents/guardians, children/students and staff information on how to take care of themselves if ill.

Cough/sneeze etiquette and frequent hand cleaning

- Post and encourage cough and sneeze etiquette <http://www.fightflu.ca/prot-eng.html>
- Post correct hand washing technique and frequency of hand washing: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/iif-vcg/wh-lm-eng.php#a
- Posters are available for downloading at: www.health.gov.sk.ca/h1n1-tools-resources
- Ensure wash stations are well supplied and consider providing increased numbers of wash stations (or alternatives such as hand sanitizers) as well as tissues and waste baskets in each room/hallway. Alcohol based hand sanitizers should only be made available under appropriate supervision.

Activities outside of the care/school setting

- Some extra curricular group activities may carry a higher risk for transmission of ILI. Programming should consider limiting those extra curricular activities when the pandemic virus is circulating at a high level in the community. Contact your local public health office if you have any questions regarding this.

Environmental Cleaning

Influenza viruses can survive on some surfaces for 2-3 days, but are quickly killed with regular household or commercially available cleaning products. It is recommended that frequently touched surfaces be cleaned twice daily, i.e. doorknobs, faucet handles, toys, computer keyboards, telephones, school bus handrails, etc.

Updates

Changes to current advice on the prevention and management of pandemic H1N1 influenza in childcare and K-12 settings will be posted to the Saskatchewan Health website at www.health.gov.sk.ca/influenza-monitor

This guidance is based on current knowledge and is subject to updates. This guidance document should be read in conjunction with relevant documents from: Public Health Agency of Canada www.phac-aspc.gc.ca and Saskatchewan Health www.health.gov.sk.ca/influenza-monitor .