

Information for Parents When Caring for Sick Children

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Saskatchewan
Ministry of
Health

Protect Yourself and Family Members from Influenza

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 people* with underlying illnesses including chronic lung diseases, heart disease, diabetes, asthma, immune deficiency, and in the second and third trimester of pregnancy.
- **How contagious:** transmission is most likely to occur during the first few days of obvious 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.

Mild symptoms of influenza-like illness, such as fever and sore throat only in persons with no underlying illness, can be managed at home. If symptoms are, or become, severe (i.e. difficulty breathing, prolonged/frequent vomiting/diarrhea, drowsiness) then seek medical care quickly.

Prevent illness and manage family members with influenza at home

- Ensure everyone washes hands often and thoroughly in warm, soapy water. If running water and soap is not available, alternatives such as foaming soap or alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be used.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or arm. If tissue used, be sure to wash or sanitize hands immediately.
- Monitor your health and the health of every household member everyday for symptoms of influenza-like illness (ILI) symptoms.
- If ILI develops, identify a separate room in the house to care for sick family members. Collect games, books, movies and other items for entertainment.
- If the sick family member is in a vulnerable risk group (i.e. under 2 years, asthma, cancer, diabetes, etc) that could increase the risk for complications (i.e. pneumonia) arrange for a medical assessment by a health care provider as early as possible and preferably within 48 hours of becoming ill.
- Avoid regular activities such as shopping, school or playing with others until symptoms resolve.

- Pillows, linens, eating utensils, hand towels, etc should not be shared without washing first. Use regular household detergents and normal wash processes to disinfect items.
- Develop an emergency call list. Include child care at home for illness or school closure, and an alternate care giver in case you become ill.
- Get yourself and your family vaccinated with the Pandemic H1N1 vaccine when vaccine becomes available.

When providing care to sick family members at home, protect yourself

- To prevent direct transmission, while a sick family member is coughing/sneezing step aside, turn away, or move to a distance of 2 m (6 feet). When holding small children who are sick, place their chin on your shoulder so that they do not cough in your face. General use of a face mask is not recommended at this time. To prevent indirect transmission avoid touching your eyes/nose/mouth.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitizer after you touch the sick person or handle anything they have touched/coughed/sneezed on.
- If you are in a vulnerable risk group, wherever possible arrange for other household member to provide care when close contact is necessary. Also, inform your health care provider about your health condition and your caregiver role.
- All disposable items used by the sick person should be thrown in the trash as soon as possible. Anyone who touches these items should wash or sanitize hands immediately.
- Keep common surfaces and objects (i.e. bedside tables, door knobs, bathroom surfaces and faucets, remotes, phone, toys, etc.) disinfected with household cleaners as per manufacturer's instructions, at least daily.
- Have sufficient supplies on hand such as fever/pain medication, tissues, soap, household cleaners, etc.

HealthLine 1-877-800-0002

Health advice 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call if you have concerns or questions.

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 .