

## Questions and Answers – H1N1 Flu Virus Outbreak

**1. Why is the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer recommending the H1N1 vaccine before the Seasonal vaccine?**

We are seeing indications of the second wave of H1N1. As with other flu seasons, H1N1 appears to have displaced circulating seasonal flu strains and since there is still an indication that the H1N1 Vaccine may be ready as early as mid November, the delivery of this program will become the priority. We will still provide the seasonal vaccine to high risk groups. In the NWT this is residents over the age of 65.

**2. Is each community capable of handling mass flu shots?**

The Department of Health and Social Services will be assisting community health centers by forming H1N1 Action Teams. These teams, consisting of nurses and support personnel, will go to each community to deliver the H1N1 Flu Shots. This will help prevent an increase in the workload of community nurses.

**3. Who will receive H1N1 shots first?**

The Department of Health and Social Services has secured enough H1N1 doses for every resident that wants to be vaccinated. All high risk and low risk residents can get the vaccine at the same time.

**4. Is the H1N1 vaccine cultured in egg product?**

Yes. Therefore, those people with an allergy (only anaphylactic reactions) to eggs should not receive this vaccine. By taking the usual precautions during the flu season (hand-washing, staying away from sick people) and because most of the rest of the population will be vaccinated, we can try to prevent these people from getting ill. However, they can be protected from other illnesses that often accompany the flu including pneumonia.

**5. Will a H1N1 vaccine be ready for the fall flu season?**

The H1N1 Flu shots will be given in one dose and two doses for children less than 10. The first shot will take place in November and the second shot in January. These shots will be offered for those who want it or need it. For information on time and location for these shots, please contact your local health centre.

It is very important to protect yourself from the flu virus. All residents should get all of the recommended shots.

**6. Who does the NWT test for H1N1?**

The NWT tests all hospitalized cases of influenza like illness (ILI). We are also doing outpatient surveillance focusing on those with moderate to severe illness. All people with mild symptoms of ILI should stay home for at least a week or until 24 hours after their symptoms resolve whatever is longer. We also use sentinel sites for testing. Sentinel sites handle random testing and help us gauge where the virus is moving.

**7. If I'm feeling sick, what should I do?**

If you are exhibiting symptoms of a respiratory illness (low grade fever, cough, runny nose and fatigue), contact your health care provider or call 1-888-920-3026 or call the Health Line at 1-888-255-1010. **It is recommended that you call either of the phones lines before you visit your health centre or emergency room.**

In the majority of cases around the world, people did not require hospitalization and have recovered from home. Therefore, if you are sick, you should stay home for at least a week, and should only go to the emergency room or health clinic if your symptoms have worsened.

**8. How many people have been hospitalized in the NWT?**

At this point, there have been 10 hospitalizations. All of these individuals have recovered. The Acting Chief Public Health Officer and staff at the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) continue to monitor and screen those cases that meet the criteria. We expect more confirmed NWT cases as we continue our surveillance efforts.

**9. Does this mean I can no longer travel?**

No. You can continue to travel at your leisure. There will be no border closure. It will not be possible to stop H1N1 at the border, port or the airport. There is no evidence that these measures stop the spread of the disease, and they may be very disruptive for international traffic and trade. Stay home and avoid travel if you feel sick.

**10. Have any Canadians been affected?**

As of September 24, 2009, there have been 78 lab confirmed deaths in Canada.

**11. What can I tell my employees if they are sick?**

To help reduce the spread of the infection, you should tell your employees to:

- Stay home if they have influenza-like illness for at least a week or until symptoms resolve, whatever is longer. Limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when they cough or sneeze or cough or sneeze in their sleeve. Throw the tissue in the trash after they use it.
- Wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after they cough or sneeze. Hand sanitizers are also effective.
- Avoid touching their eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way. Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Keep common surfaces clean.

**12. What is the NWT doing to slow the spread of H1N1?**

The office of the Chief Public Health Officer and DHSS staff are working with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and our provincial and territorial counterparts to determine the best

courses of action and continue to share information about the illness. In collaboration with PHAC, we are running health promotion campaigns that provide tips on flu prevention.

### **13. What are the symptoms of the H1N1 Flu Virus?**

The symptoms of the H1N1 Flu Virus in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza infection and include fever, fatigue, lack of appetite, coughing and sore throat. Some people with the H1N1 Flu Virus have also reported vomiting and diarrhea.

Influenza and other (severe) respiratory infections are transmitted from person to person via the respiratory route. Coughs and sneezes release the germs into the air where they can be breathed in by others. Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system when someone touches their mouth and/or nose or rubs their eyes. The H1N1 flu virus is spread through droplets and is not an airborne disease.

### **14. How can I slow the spread of the H1N1 flu virus?**

General infection control precautions can help to limit the spread of influenza. Some of the ways you can help slow the spread of the H1N1 flu virus are:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or cough or sneeze in your sleeve. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way. Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick, we recommend that you stay home from work or school for at least a week or until 24 hours after their symptoms resolve whatever is longer. Limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

### **15. What is the incubation period of the H1N1 Flu Virus?**

Initial investigation shows that the incubation period of the H1N1 Flu Virus is between two to seven days.

### **16. Is it safe to attend mass gatherings like worship services, festivals, or sports events?**

There is no need at this time to cancel mass gatherings like worship services, festivals, or sports events. Simple precautions at the individual level, like frequent handwashing, coughing and sneezing into the arm instead of hands, and staying home when sick will help slow the spread of the H1N1 flu virus.

If you are an event organizer, you should:

- ensure that there are adequate handwashing stations and hand sanitizers for event participants and that there is signage to remind people of the H1N1 flu virus and proper handwashing technique

- consider the capacity of the host community to respond if there was an outbreak of H1N1 flu virus, and/or the capacity of the community to respond to another emergency in light of current healthcare and infrastructure demands to respond to H1N1.

**17. Are all of the cases of the H1N1 Flu Virus severe?**

The majority of cases around the world have been mild and have not required hospitalization. In general, people have recovered at home.

**18. What is the difference between seasonal influenza, avian influenza and swine influenza?**

Influenza viruses are commonly circulating in our environment. Different strains can cause illness in humans, bird and pigs.

Regular seasonal influenza is a human strain of the influenza virus. Humans have some natural immunity to the strains that are in common circulation, and this immunity can be bolstered by immunization with a seasonal influenza vaccine.

Avian influenza is an influenza virus that commonly affects birds, and swine influenza is a strain of the virus that usually affects pigs. These illnesses cause the same respiratory symptoms in their hosts.

Sometimes, humans and animals can pass strains of influenza back and forth to one another, such as when humans become ill with avian or swine influenza, usually from direct contact with animals who are ill. When this happens, there is a risk that the animal influenza virus can mutate and gain the ability to spread between humans. This mutated virus can develop into a new strain of influenza that humans don't have any immunity against.

**19. What is an influenza pandemic?**

An influenza pandemic is defined as a new or novel influenza virus that spreads easily between humans. When new influenza viruses are introduced into the environment, humans don't have any natural immunity to protect against them. Therefore, there is a risk that that new influenza viruses could develop into a pandemic if the virus passes easily from human-to-human.

**20. Why has the World Health Organization raised the Pandemic Levels?**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has raised the Global Pandemic Alert to level 6. This is the highest level of alertness. According to WHO definitions of phases - the virus has caused sustained community transmission in more than one WHO region.

**21. What does Pandemic level 6 mean to the NWT?**

Very little. At this point we will not change our surveillance efforts. We will swab all hospitalized patients with influenza like illness (ILI) symptoms. We will continue out-patient surveillance efforts throughout the NWT.

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Office of the Chief Public Health Officer  
Influenza Information Line: 1-888-920-3026  
www.hlthss.gov.nt.ca

**22. Can you get the H1N1 Flu Virus from eating pork?**

No. Proper cooking of pork products would kill any viruses.

For more information:

- [www.hlthss.gov.nt.ca](http://www.hlthss.gov.nt.ca) (Department of Health and Social Services)
- [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine\\_200904-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine_200904-eng.php) (Public Health Agency of Canada)
- <http://www.fightflu.ca>

