



Novel H1N1 Flu Virus (swine flu)

Information for Parents of Children in Schools and Daycares

What is the novel H1N1 flu virus?

The novel H1N1 flu is a new strain of influenza. It causes the same symptoms as seasonal flu: fever, cough, shortness of breath, muscle aches, fatigue, severe headache, sore throat, lack of appetite, and possibly nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. The novel H1N1 flu virus is currently circulating in Ottawa and in many countries around the world.

How does the virus spread?

Influenza is spread from person to person through droplets and direct contact (touching contaminated surfaces). Coughs and sneezes release droplets containing the influenza virus into the air where it can be breathed in by others within two metres (six feet). Flu viruses can typically survive on hands long enough to transmit the virus to another person and on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs for a prolonged period of time, where it can be picked up on hands and transmitted when a person touches their mouth, nose or eyes. People with influenza are most infectious while they are actually feeling ill.

How can I stop the spread of the novel H1N1 virus?

Parents, children and staff at schools, daycare and other group activities can take these steps to help prevent illness:

1. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for 15 seconds. A 60-90 per cent alcohol-based hand rub is also effective.
2. Cough or sneeze into a tissue, not your hand. Throw out the tissue right away, and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve or arm – not your hand.
3. Don't share things that go in the mouth, such as cups, juice boxes, water bottles, forks/spoons, musical instruments with mouthpieces, etc.
4. Watch for flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches and possibly vomiting or diarrhea. Stay home if you are ill, and do not return to school/daycare/work/other group activities until you are feeling well enough to resume your regular activities.
5. Clean the surfaces you and your children frequently touch on a daily basis. This includes counters, fridge handles, faucet taps, bathrooms, toilet flush handles, railings, telephones, television remotes and various personal items.

When should people wash their hands?

- After sneezing, coughing, or blowing your nose
- After using the bathroom
- Before preparing food or eating
- Before touching your face
- When you come into contact with someone who is sick.

How can I clean hard surfaces to stop the novel H1N1 virus from spreading?

Washing surfaces with regular household cleaners will help remove the novel H1N1 flu virus. You may want to follow the cleaning step with a disinfecting step to kill the virus. To make your own disinfectant, mix one teaspoon of household bleach* with one cup of water. Wash the area with soap and water first. Rinse thoroughly with clean water, then apply the bleach solution. Leave the bleach solution on the surface for at least 10 minutes, then let air dry, or wipe with a clean paper towel.

** Always protect your skin and face when using bleach, use it in a well-ventilated area and store it in a cool, dry area away from children and pets.*

My child has been in contact with someone who had the novel H1N1 flu. What should I do?

If your children are well, they should continue with their normal activities, including school or daycare. If they become ill, keep them home from school, daycare and other group activities until they have no fever and are feeling well. The same advice applies to adults. Siblings (and parents) of children with confirmed novel H1N1 flu do not need to stay home as long as they are well.

Should staff or children at schools/daycares wear masks?

No.

Will a school or daycare be closed if someone there has the novel H1N1 flu?

No, we are not advising schools or daycares to close if someone there comes down with the novel H1N1 flu. We do not advise schools to close during the regular flu season either. All regular school/daycare activities can and should continue, but as always, ill children and staff should stay home until they no longer have a fever and are feeling well.

Should my child get a flu shot?

The influenza virus changes each year, which is why a new influenza vaccine comes out each year. The flu shot available from last winter does not protect against the novel H1N1 strain of influenza. The World Health Organization and vaccine manufacturers have started work on a vaccine for the novel H1N1 flu, but this is not likely to be available before the fall.

Are there medications to treat the novel H1N1 flu?

Most healthy people who get influenza – including the novel H1N1 flu – get better on their own and do not need medication. However, the doctor may recommend antiviral medications for people who get very ill, or have a medical condition that puts them at increased risk for serious complications.

My child is showing symptoms of the flu. How do I care for him or her?

If your children experience severe symptoms such as high fever and intense difficulty breathing, please make sure they are seen by a health care provider or go to a hospital.

With milder symptoms, care of your children at home should include:

- Limiting contact with other household members
- Teaching them to cough and sneeze into a tissue or their sleeve instead of their hands
- Ensuring they wash their hands frequently
- Giving them plenty of fluids
- Making sure they get adequate rest

Your children may resume their regular activities when they no longer have a fever and are feeling well. The presence of a cough alone, in the absence of other symptoms, is not a reason to stay away from school. It is not unusual for individuals to experience a cough for days to weeks beyond the period of infection.

What if my child has a chronic medical condition?

If your child shows flu-like symptoms and has a chronic medical condition, for example that affects their heart, lungs (e.g. asthma) or immune system (e.g. diabetes, cancer treatment), you may wish to speak with their doctor. Children with a medical condition who are well enough to go to school or daycare do not need to stay home just because the novel H1N1 virus is around. While most children who get influenza get better on their own, children who have a chronic medical condition may benefit from early treatment with anti-viral medication. Many children with high-risk medical conditions are advised to get a routine flu shot each year – speak with your child’s doctor about this.

What is Ottawa Public Health doing about the situation?

Ottawa Public Health is working closely with the schools and school boards in the city of Ottawa to monitor and manage the presence of the novel H1N1 flu virus. As part of ongoing enhanced surveillance measures for the new virus, we had earlier requested that schools and daycares report absenteeism rates in excess of 10 per cent (which may indicate an “outbreak”). Some schools in the city have recently reported unusual patterns of absenteeism, which we are actively following and managing. Ottawa Public Health manages outbreaks of infectious diseases – including the novel H1N1 flu virus – in schools and daycares through daily monitoring of schools with high absenteeism rates and education of school staff on infection control and prevention of diseases.

Will I be notified if there is a confirmed case of novel H1N1 flu in my child’s school?

Ottawa Public Health has recently sent a letter to parents and guardians of children in all elementary and secondary schools in Ottawa to inform them that we are aware of novel H1N1 flu cases in several schools across the city and to advise them about what they can do to protect their children. As is the case with the regular flu season, we do not send a letter to parents each time a case is confirmed in a school. Keeping children who are ill away from school and following simple prevention measures will help protect the health of all children in our city.

Where can I get more information?

Ottawa Public Health Information Line: 613-580-6744

Ottawa Public Health: www.ottawa.ca/health

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care: www.health.gov.on.ca

Travel Health Notices: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/pub-eng.php

Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca or 1-800-454-8302

Canadian Paediatric Society: www.caringforkids.cps.ca/index.htm

This information has been adapted with thanks from a fact sheet published by Toronto Public Health. Ottawa Public Health assumes all responsibility for the content of this fact sheet.