

H1N1 FLU: BACKGROUND AND INTERIM GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND STAFF

1. Influenza

Influenza is a respiratory illness caused by a virus. It can cause a variety of symptoms, such as fever, cough, aches and physical exhaustion. People usually recover from the flu without medical help.

The flu virus can spread easily from person to person by coughing or sneezing, by hand-to-hand contact with an infected person, or after handling objects contaminated by infected people. The virus can survive on hard surfaces for up to 48 hours, on cloth, paper or tissue for up to 12 hours and on hands for about five minutes, long enough for you to inadvertently touch your mouth, nose or eyes and transfer the virus to your body. People are usually contagious for about a week starting the day before symptoms appear. Not everyone who gets the flu develops symptoms but they still may be able to spread it to others, especially if they cough or sneeze.

2. H1N1 flu

H1N1 is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to those of the seasonal flu. Cases of H1N1 flu have been reported in people around the world, including Canada.

Flu viruses change over time. It is difficult to accurately predict what will happen. Although there have been cases of severe illness and death associated with this virus, most individuals with H1N1 in Manitoba have recovered without specific medical care or hospitalization.

3. Symptoms of Influenza-like Illness (ILI)

- Sudden fever of 38°C (100.4°F)
- Cough AND
- One or more of the following: sore throat, muscle aches, or physical exhaustion.
- Children may also feel sick to their stomach, vomit or have diarrhea, but these symptoms are uncommon in adults.
- Elderly people and people with lowered immunity may not develop a fever.

4. Infection Prevention

At the present time, the H1N1 flu virus appears to be transmitted in the same manner as other flu strains. All staff and students should follow routine measures to prevent spread of infection, including:

• Hand Hygiene

Staff and students should wash their hands regularly with soap and water, especially after coughing and sneezing. When soap and water are unavailable, hand sanitizers may be an acceptable alternative if hands are not visibly soiled.

- **Cough Etiquette**

Staff and students should also be taught to follow cough and sneeze etiquette practices including coughing into a sleeve or elbow and using tissues.

- **Cleaning**

Maintaining routine cleaning practices for schools and school buses is advised.

NOTE: The use of masks by healthy individuals in non-health care settings has not been shown to be effective in preventing people from getting the flu. For most people, wearing a mask is not necessary or recommended.

5. Education

- Provide parents/guardians and staff with information on H1N1 flu, symptoms to watch for and school protocols for sending a child or staff member home.
- Educate staff and students on good hygiene practices, including proper hand washing and cough etiquette.
- Post age appropriate signage about cough and sneeze etiquette and hand hygiene in publicly accessible areas.

6. Influenza-like Illness Symptoms in Students or Staff

Individuals with Influenza-like Illness should be sent home promptly to prevent further spread of infection, as soon as it is safe and practical to do so.

7. Reporting to Public Health

Schools are requested to report instances of unusually high absenteeism to the public health nurse at their local community public health office.

A listing of public health offices can be found at:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html>

8. School Closures

At this time, there has been no public health reason to close schools. Health officials assess the situation on an ongoing basis to determine the most appropriate public health interventions to best protect the health of Manitobans.

Any decision to order school closures would involve careful consideration of the specific situation at that time, taking into account the spread and severity of the virus within Manitoba, as well as recommendations from the Public Health Agency of Canada, and other jurisdictions. In the event that the public health risk is considered sufficient to warrant closing a school or group of schools, direction will come from the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth, who will provide such direction based on consultation with the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer and/or the regional medical officer of health.

9. For more Information

For additional information on H1N1 flu, please visit: www.manitoba.ca/flu

For information for schools, please visit: www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/flu/index.html

For more information on how to care for someone with the flu, please see the fact sheet *Self Care and Influenza* or contact Health Links-Info Santé at **788-8200** or **1-888-315-9257** (toll-free).