

September 11, 2009

Superintendents, School Divisions:

We would like to provide further information to you about pandemic H1N1 influenza and how it may affect some staff in your respective schools. It is expected that pandemic H1N1 influenza will continue to be present in communities across the province over the coming months. While most Manitobans who are exposed to the virus will not require specific medical care, some may have further questions about the best way to limit their exposure, especially those who consider themselves to be at increased risk for severe illness.

The following risk markers do not increase the risk of catching the flu, but they do increase the risk of developing a more severe illness:

- pre-existing health conditions like diabetes, lung diseases including asthma, heart and kidney diseases;
- HIV, or other conditions with weakened immune systems;
- obesity and/or malnutrition;
- smoking, substance abuse or alcoholism;
- Aboriginal descent;
- pregnancy, and
- decreased access to health care.

Early treatment can help to reduce the risk of severe illness, so it's important that individuals who may be at greater risk for severe illness visit their health care provider as soon as they can if they develop flu-like symptoms (ideally within 24 hours).

It is also important to follow basic precautions like cough etiquette and frequent handwashing to prevent infection. If someone in your workplace/classroom is showing flu-like symptoms, they should stay home until they feel better. We have also included *H1N1 Flu FAQ for Pregnant Women*, which we hope you will share. It provides helpful information about infection prevention, symptoms of severe illness and when to seek medical advice.

As an employer, a school division is responsible under *The Workplace Safety and Health Act* to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of all school staff, and to comply with the Act and regulations. This includes providing all staff with information, instruction, and training to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, their safety, health and welfare on the job. This responsibility under the Act may be fulfilled at least in part by developing and implementing policies that address the routine measures for preventing spread of infection, such as reminding students and staff to stay home when ill and to return when they are well enough to attend work or school. To assist you with this process, Manitoba Health and Healthy Living has developed the guidance document *H1N1 Flu: Background and Interim Guidance for School Administrators and Staff*, which was sent to superintendents on August 14, 2009.

The Act also provides that a worker may refuse to work or do particular work where he or she believes *on reasonable grounds* that the work is a danger to his or her safety or health. The worker must report the refusal to work to the employer, who must remedy the dangerous condition, if any, right away; if not remedied, the person who received the refusal to work report or a designated person must inspect the workplace and take necessary actions to remedy any dangerous condition or ensure this is done. If a dangerous condition is not remedied, a safety and health officer designated under the Act may be notified. The officer will investigate the matter and decide whether the work is a danger to the worker's safety or health. If the officer decides the work is in fact a danger to the worker, the officer will make an order regarding it. Where the dangerous condition is remedied, the worker would not be entitled to continue to refuse to work. If you have questions or concerns about workplace safety and health and the right to refuse work, please contact Workplace Safety and Health at 945-6848.

For the latest information on pandemic H1N1 flu, please visit: www.manitoba.ca/flu. Information for schools can also be found at: www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/flu/index.html.

Please share this information.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Arlene Wilgosh
Deputy Minister
Health and Healthy Living

Original signed by

Gerald Farthing
Deputy Minister
Education, Citizenship and Youth

*Attachment