

Manitoba



Health and Healthy Living

Public Health Division

Office of the Chief Public Health Officer

4th Floor-300 Carlton Street, Winnipeg MB, Canada R3B 3M9

T 204-788-6666 F 204-948-2204

Joel.Kettner@gov.mb.ca

June 25, 2009

Dear Health Care Provider:

Re: Occupational Exposure of health care providers to novel Influenza A:H1N1

I am writing to address issues that have been raised about the use of antiviral prophylaxis for health care providers who may have been exposed to the novel influenza A:H1N1 as well as issues that have been raised about the reassignment of health care providers to minimize such exposures.

This new H1N1 influenza virus has now become widespread. Every Manitoban is now at risk of being exposed in any location and setting of our province and beyond. Infection prevention and control practice that is appropriate to the setting remains the best defence against spread and exposure. Guidelines for infection control and prevention for all health and non-health care settings are available at <http://www.gov.mb.ca/flu/index.html>

Even with the best efforts of all of us, it is expected that many, if not most, Manitobans may eventually be exposed to the influenza virus – this year or next. So far, most that have been infected have had a relatively mild and less serious illness and have recovered without specific medical care or hospitalization. More specifically, It has been estimated that 99.9% of Manitobans that have been exposed to this virus have not required hospitalization. In addition, there have been no reports of patients with severe illness and/or admitted to an intensive care unit in Manitoba that are known to have been exposed by caring for patients.

The risks and benefits of antiviral medications (e.g. oseltamivir and zanamavir) for this new virus are not yet fully known. The risk of side effects and the development of resistance are two important reasons to use these antivirals with caution. In addition, most planners agree that the limited stock of antivirals should be used for those patients and circumstances where the need and potential benefit will be greatest. For these and other reasons, prophylactic use (prevention before the onset of symptoms) of antivirals is thought to be rarely, if ever indicated at this time. Early treatment for health care workers with symptoms should be considered according to current guidelines. <http://www.gov.mb.ca/flu/index.html> Health care professionals, compared to other Manitobans, are probably most advantaged to avail themselves of appropriate

Manitoba
spirited energy

care because of their knowledge, ability to self assess, and their relatively easy access to care.

If a health care provider is concerned about potential or actual occupational exposure they should notify their occupational health or infection control department in addition to monitoring themselves for symptoms and signs of influenza-like-illness (ILI). All staff are encouraged to use judgment and flexibility in their application of these guidelines to specific situations.

As per usual, health care providers with symptoms of ILI are advised to stay home while ill and to return to work when they are confident that they can do their job without putting their patients or fellow staff at significant risk.

Please take steps to ensure this information is shared widely with all appropriate staff in your facility/region. If you have any questions or comments about this letter, please contact the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer of Manitoba Health and Healthy Living. For further consultation, please contact your local infection prevention and control practitioner or your regional medical officer of health (788-8666). Thank you for your anticipated understanding and cooperation.

Sincerely,

"Original signed by Joel Kettner"

Joel Kettner, MD, MSc, FRCSC, FRCPC
Chief Public Health Officer

CC CEOs of Regional Health Authorities