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# *Your H1N1 Preparedness Guide*



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Canada

The best way to help reduce the impact of an influenza (flu) pandemic is to protect yourself, your family and friends, stay informed and provide support to others.

This guide will provide you with information to help you prepare for and protect yourself and your family against the H1N1 flu virus. Find out the symptoms, risks, and how to care for someone who is sick, as well as information to find additional resources from local sources.

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Également disponible en français sous le titre : Votre guide de protection contre le virus H1N1.

This publication is available to order. Please call: 1 800 O-Canada (1-800-622-6232) or download from [www.fightflu.ca](http://www.fightflu.ca).  
TTY: 1-800-926-9105

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# What is the H1N1 Flu Virus?

## *What is the H1N1 flu virus?*

The following information helps to explain the difference between the H1N1 flu and seasonal flu.

### **Pandemic H1N1 Flu Virus**

The pandemic H1N1 flu virus is different than regular seasonal flu.

In spring 2009, the H1N1 flu virus emerged in North America.

This is a new strain of influenza and because **humans have little to no natural immunity to this virus**, it can cause serious and widespread illness.

### **Seasonal Flu**

Influenza, or the flu, is a common and highly contagious, respiratory disease that affects the nose, throat and lungs.

Influenza viruses can change rapidly. That's why there's a new flu shot made every year to protect against the circulating virus strains.

Yearly exposure to existing strains of the flu provides some level of immunity to seasonal flu.

### **How is H1N1 spread?**

When someone coughs or sneezes, tiny droplets filled with virus can travel up to two metres away. If these droplets land in your eyes, nose or mouth, you may become infected with the virus.

# What is the H1N1 Flu Virus?



## What is an influenza pandemic?

An influenza pandemic is declared when a new strain of influenza (flu) virus that has never been seen before emerges and begins to spread quickly around the world. The H1N1 virus is new, so people have little or no natural immunity to it. The H1N1 flu virus spread quickly around the world and in June 2009, the World Health Organization declared an influenza pandemic.

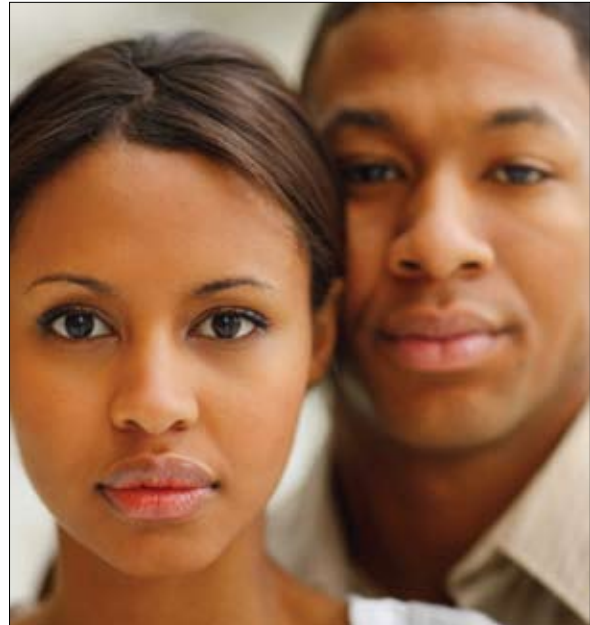
# What is the H1N1 Flu Virus?

## Why did Canada change the name from the human swine flu to the H1N1 virus?

Canada changed the name of the virus in order to be consistent with the World Health Organization. The virus did not change. H1N1 and human swine influenza refer to the same virus.

### Did you know?

You cannot get the H1N1 flu virus from eating pork. This virus passes from human to human.



## *Flu prevention checklist*

You can play an active role in staying healthy and preventing the spread of the H1N1 flu virus. Follow these simple steps:

### **Wash your hands frequently**

Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds to help remove bacteria and viruses. Wash before and after eating, after you have been in a public place, after using the washroom, after coughing and sneezing and after touching surfaces that may have been contaminated. An alcohol-based hand sanitizer is also effective in killing viruses.

### **Keep your hands away from your face**

In most cases, the H1N1 virus enters the body through the eyes, nose or mouth.

### **Cough and sneeze into your arm, not your hand**

If you use a tissue, dispose of it as soon as possible and wash your hands.

### **Get immunized**

Get your H1N1 flu shot.



✓ **Keep common surface areas clean and disinfected**

Doorknobs, light switches, telephones, keyboards and other surfaces can become contaminated with all kinds of bacteria and viruses. Regular cleaning and disinfecting of these surfaces with normal household disinfectants can help. Viruses can live on hard surfaces for up to 48 hours.

✓ **Stay healthy**

Eat healthy foods and stay physically active to keep your immune system strong.

✓ **If you get sick, stay home**

If you think you have the flu and are otherwise healthy, you should stay home from school or work until your symptoms are gone. If your symptoms get worse, call your health care provider.

## *Symptoms of the flu virus (H1N1 and seasonal)*

Everyone is at risk of catching the H1N1 flu virus — even healthy, young adults. We do not know exactly what symptoms the virus will cause in each case, but we expect that an average sickness will show the following symptoms:

- |                         |                                   |                      |               |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| ▶ <b>Almost always:</b> | • Sudden onset of cough and fever |                      |               |
| ▶ <b>Common:</b>        | • Fatigue                         | • Muscle aches       | • Sore throat |
|                         | • Headache                        | • Decreased appetite | • Runny nose  |
| ▶ <b>Sometimes:</b>     | • Nausea                          | • Vomiting           | • Diarrhea    |

People who are generally healthy and develop these flu symptoms can get better at home. The worst of the infection will likely be over within

one week. If you have flu-like symptoms and are otherwise healthy, stay home to avoid spreading the virus.



## Severity Indicators

If you develop the following symptoms, you need to see a health care provider right away:

- **Shortness of breath**, rapid or difficulty breathing
- **Chest pain**
- Bluish or grey skin color
- Bloody or coloured mucus/spit
- Sudden dizziness or confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- High fever lasting more than three days
- Low blood pressure

## Additional symptoms to watch for in children:

- Not drinking enough fluids or eating
- Not waking up or interacting
- Irritability; not wanting to play or be held

### Did you know?

Seasonal influenza is a serious illness that infects millions of Canadians every year. It is estimated that 2,000 to 8,000 people — mostly seniors, children and those with chronic health problems — die each year from influenza.

# Symptoms

## People at Risk of Complications

The following groups are ***not*** more likely to get the H1N1 virus. However, they are more at risk of developing complications if they do get sick:

- ▶ 1. Children under five years of age (especially those less than two years old)
- ▶ 2. Women who are pregnant
- ▶ 3. People with chronic conditions such as:
  - Heart disease
  - Kidney disease
  - Diabetes
  - Asthma and chronic lung disease
  - Immunosuppressed (people taking cancer drugs or people with HIV/AIDS)
  - Neurological disorders
  - Liver disease
  - Blood disorders
  - Severe obesity

Early treatment can help to reduce the risk of complications, so it's important that you speak to a medical professional if you develop flu symptoms, and seek medical care if the symptoms worsen.

**IMPORTANT** *If you have flu symptoms and you have one of these risk factors, contact a health care provider as soon as possible — antiviral medications may be needed.*



## *Caring for someone who is sick*

Here are some ideas and suggestions to keep in mind when caring for someone who is sick. Most people who get sick with the H1N1 flu virus can be cared for at home. People with risk conditions — such as asthma or diabetes — should not look after people who are sick, if possible.

### ▶ **Step #1. Protect yourself and others**

- **Clean your hands** with either soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer after touching items that the sick person has touched (such as dishes, towels and clothes), before you eat and before and after touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- If possible, have the **sick person wear a mask** to control the spread of virus filled droplets. This is especially important, when someone is within two metres or six feet of a sick person. If the sick person cannot wear a mask, encourage the use of a tissue when

coughing and sneezing. Dispose of the tissue immediately.

- There is no evidence that wearing a mask will protect you from getting the flu. However, if you wear a mask, wash your hands before and after putting on, or taking off, the mask.

### ▶ **Step #2. Allow the sick person to rest (away from others)**

- It is expected that anyone sick with the H1N1 flu virus will need lots of rest and will be contagious for about seven days from the onset of the symptoms – especially in the first few days.

# Caring for someone who is sick

- Clean items (such as the phone, TV remote) and surfaces that the sick person has touched using normal household disinfectant. The virus can survive on hard surfaces for up to 48 hours.
- The sick person can resume normal activities after symptoms are resolved.

## ▶ **Step #3. Treat the fever and cough**

- Fever often comes with chills or aches and pains. Certain medications (such as acetaminophen, for example Tylenol®, or ibuprofen, for example Advil®) may help to reduce these symptoms. Do not give Aspirin® to children to treat a fever, as it has been linked to Reye's Syndrome<sup>1</sup>.

## ▶ **Step #4. Give lots of fluids and nutritious food and ensure a smoke-free environment**

- Warm drinks, such as tea with honey and lemon or chicken soup, can be very soothing for a sore throat. The sick person may not have an appetite, but simple foods may be welcomed.
- Cigarette smoking is hard on the lungs of a person with an infection. The sick person should avoid smoking. Second-hand smoke is harmful also, so people should not smoke around the sick person.

<sup>1</sup> A potentially fatal disease associated with aspirin consumption by children with viral diseases.

# Caring for someone who is sick

## ▶ **Step #5. Keep the sick person's things separate**

- Each sick person should have his/her own personal items (towel, face cloth, toothbrush etc.) and they should be kept separate from the belongings of others in the house. Wash your hands after touching the items belonging to the sick person and avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Keep common surfaces (door knobs, light switches) clean and disinfected.

## ▶ **Step #6. Stay alert for complications**

- When treated at home with proper care, most people will begin to feel better after a few days. Take the sick person's temperature

daily to track any fever. Sometimes people with underlying medical conditions – such as asthma or diabetes – may develop complications and so may need to see a health care provider.

**IMPORTANT** See page 7 for a list of severity indicators. If any of these complications occur, call a health care provider. Monitor yourself and other family members for flu symptoms.

### Did you know?

Typically, when people recover from the flu, they develop antibodies that will protect them if they are exposed to the same virus again. These people make the best caregivers!

## *Vaccine and antivirals*

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### **What is a vaccine?**

Vaccines are injections that give you a high level of immunity to a virus. Each time a new virus is discovered, a new vaccine must be developed (even for seasonal flu).

In Canada, there is enough H1N1 vaccine for everyone who wants and needs it. Each province and territory has set-up programs to administer the vaccine to the public.

### **What is an antiviral?**

Antivirals are prescription medications used to treat viral illnesses, including the flu. If taken shortly after getting sick (within the first 24 to 48 hours), they can reduce flu symptoms, shorten the length of illness and may reduce serious complications. They are available in two forms: **a pill (called oseltamivir or Tamiflu®)** or **an inhaler (called zanamivir or Relenza®)**.

If a doctor prescribes antivirals for you, it's important that you finish your entire prescription. This will avoid the risk of the virus becoming resistant to the drugs. Antivirals are effective against seasonal and H1N1 flu.

## *Planning ahead*

### **Helping Others**

Speak with family, friends and neighbours to figure out how you might help each other during the flu season.

It is good to know who can look after you and your family members in case you get sick. The best caregiver is someone who does not have risk factors for complications of the flu (see page 8). Pregnant women, for example, should not take care of someone who is sick with the H1N1 flu virus, if at all possible.



# Planning ahead

Below is a planning checklist that identifies the types of things you need to consider when creating your preparedness plan for yourself, your family, friends, neighbours, etc.

- Consider a back-up person who can provide care in case the main caregiver becomes sick or must go to work.
- Who will help the sick person go for a health care assessment and get antiviral medications (if needed)?
- Who will look after the sick person for the first few days to ensure they get plenty of rest, fluids, food, comfort items, and watch for complications?
- Who will help with tasks such as child care, pet care, cooking and housework?
- Who will provide care for your children if the daycare centre or school is closed because of the pandemic?

Be sure to have a back-up plan if child care facilities or schools close and you must continue working. If your school or daycare centre closes, students and children will be encouraged not to hang out in large numbers in other places.

**IMPORTANT** *If you are at risk of complications, (page 8), or live in a remote or isolated area, see your health care provider. Ensure you have enough medications on hand for your conditions and know how to access antivirals if you fall ill with H1N1.*



## Preparedness Kit

Put together a home preparedness kit *before* anyone gets sick. When you are sick, you won't want to go out and get groceries or health supplies.

Here are some examples of household items that you may want to have in your home:

### Non-perishable food

- Canned soups
- Frozen or canned fruits, vegetables, meats and fish
- Frozen or canned juices, tea bags
- Easy dinners, such as spaghetti and tomato sauce
- Breakfast cereals, honey, sugar or sweetener
- Bottled water, Tetra Pak milk or soy milk
- Baby food or formula
- Pet food

### Health and cleaning supplies

- Thermometer
- Hand soap
- Pain and fever medication (e.g. acetaminophen, for example Tylenol®, or ibuprofen, for example Advil®)
- Supply of prescription medications
- Masks (optional)
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Cough suppressants, cough lozenges (not for children under six years old)
- Laundry detergent
- Garbage bags
- Household cleaning supplies
- Tissues, toilet paper
- Feminine hygiene products, diapers and wipes

# Planning ahead

## Make sure you have the following important contact information

Government of Canada information line: 1 800 O-Canada (1-800-622-6232)

Provincial/territorial information line (see page 20): \_\_\_\_\_

Health care facility telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Number for emergency medical help: 911 or \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Pharmacist: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Caregiver identified in plans: \_\_\_\_\_ Home: \_\_\_\_\_

Work: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

People identified in plans: \_\_\_\_\_ Home: \_\_\_\_\_

Work: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

**People with an existing medical condition — especially if they are on medications — should prepare a medical history and take it with them when going to visit a health care provider.**

Medical history for: \_\_\_\_\_

Health conditions: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Medications (type and dose): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Allergies: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## *Canada's plan*

The Canadian Pandemic Preparedness Plan has been developed to help protect Canadians in a flu pandemic.

Canada was one of the first countries in the world to have a national pandemic plan. First drafted in 2004, Canada's plan is updated regularly to reflect new threats like the H1N1 flu virus. Provincial, territorial and local governments, as well as doctors, hospitals and laboratories, have developed preparedness plans that follow Canada's plan.





## The plan is based on six key strategies:

- ▶ **1.** Early detection of the new virus.
- ▶ **2.** Ongoing updates to keep Canadians well-informed about what is happening and what to do as a result.
- ▶ **3.** Emergency health services to care for those who are sick.
- ▶ **4.** Antiviral medications to help prevent complications for those at risk (see page 12).
- ▶ **5.** Pandemic vaccine for the H1N1 flu virus.
- ▶ **6.** Public health measures to prevent the spread of infection — recommendations about travel, airports, public gatherings and advice to schools, businesses and communities.

## Resources

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Stay informed about the H1N1 flu virus in your area by checking your local television and radio stations, and your local newspapers.

Here is a list of health information numbers across Canada. You can call them if you need information on when to seek medical care and about health care facilities in your area:

**Alberta** 1-866-408-5465

**British Columbia** 8-1-1

**Newfoundland and Labrador** 1-888-709-2929

**Manitoba** (204) 788-8200  
or tollfree at 1-888-315-9257

**New Brunswick** 1-800-580-0038

**Northwest Territories** 1-888-920-3026

**Nova Scotia** 8-1-1

**Nunavut** [www.fluNU.ca](http://www.fluNU.ca)\*

**Ontario** 1-800-476-9708, TTY : 1-800-387-5559

**Prince Edward Island** 1-888-748-5454

**Quebec** 8-1-1

**Saskatchewan** 1-877-800-0002

**Yukon** 8-1-1

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\* Visit [www.fluNU.ca](http://www.fluNU.ca) for the number of your local health centre.

For more information on how to fight the flu or to download this guide, please visit [www.fightflu.ca](http://www.fightflu.ca)

To order additional copies of this publication, please call **1 800 O-Canada**



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