

# H1N1 and Ontario First Nations Communities

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# What we know about H1N1

- H1N1 (previously referred to as “Swine Flu”) is a new influenza virus
- Virus spreads among people similar to seasonal flu, ie. through close contact
- World Health Organization declared H1N1 as an influenza pandemic based on the international spread of the virus
  - “Pandemic” declaration is based on regions of the world affected and NOT based on the severity of illness. The illness in the majority of cases is mild to moderate
- While the situation is being taken very seriously in Canada and Ontario, neither jurisdiction has declared an emergency

# How does H1N1 flu compare with seasonal flu?

- Seasonal flu affects 10-25% of Canadians each year, typically between September and April
- While the majority who become sick will recover, the seasonal flu results in an average of 20,000 hospitalizations and 4,000 deaths in Canada annually
- H1N1 flu virus has the potential to be at least as serious as seasonal flu
- Because this is a new virus, most people will not have immunity to it. There is currently no vaccine. Illness may be more severe and widespread as a result

# H1N1 in Ontario

- Approximately 3,400 confirmed cases in Ontario, including:
  - 192 hospitalizations
  - 12 deaths
- H1N1 virus considered mild in the majority of cases
- Majority of deaths and hospitalizations involving H1N1 had underlying medical conditions
- As of July 3rd, approximately 47 cases in Ontario First Nations communities:
  - Sioux Lookout Zone: 36 cases across 9 communities
  - Thunder Bay Zone: 11 cases across 7 communities
- Majority of cases considered mild but there have been hospitalized cases, in addition to a small number admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU)
- There have been no deaths reported

# Pandemic Preparedness and First Nations

- Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (OHPiP) is the provincial plan to guide pandemic preparedness and response activities in Ontario's health system
- Ontario was the first jurisdiction in Canada to develop a chapter dedicated to the health response in First Nations communities
  - Chapter 20 developed collaboratively between MOHLTC, PTOs and the Chiefs of Ontario
- Chapter 20 establishes the following:
  1. Health Canada is the lead for managing the health response in First Nations communities
  2. Off-reserve FN will access provincial health services like any other Ontarian
  3. MOHLTC supports Health Canada and First Nations communities through:
    - A. On-going communication and updates on the situation in Ontario
    - B. Provision of antivirals from the provincial stockpile
    - C. Provision of vaccines
    - D. Provision of scientific and medical guidance, as requested
    - E. Logistical supports for health care supplies and equipment

# Communications

- Information is posted on the First Nations Pandemic Website: [www.pandemic.knet.ca](http://www.pandemic.knet.ca). Some info is available in Cree, Oji-cree and Ojibway.
- FNIH is operating a telephone hotline(1-877-365-3623) daily from 9am to 6pm (EST).
- Weekly teleconferences are held with First Nations PTOs, Independents and Chiefs of Ontario.
- The Regional Director is updating directly the Ontario Regional Chief.
- Zone Directors will contact Chief directly if cases are confirmed in their communities
- Regular teleconferences and communiques have been held with First Nation Chiefs and Health Directors

# Pandemic Preparedness

- Zone program managers have approached each community to fill out a pandemic preparedness questionnaire to obtain a detailed picture of supports which communities will need to complete and test their plans
- A community pandemic planner has been hired to support First Nations over the coming months hosted by UOI.
  - Contact Tony Jocko, 1-877-702-5200, ext 2313
  - Email: [jocton@anishnabek.ca](mailto:jocton@anishnabek.ca)
- Health Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada's has activated its Regional Emergency Coordination Centre to Level 2

# Pandemic Response

- FNIH has shipped personal protective equipment for health staff and supplies such as hand sanitizers to communities
- Antivirals have been pre-positioned in nursing stations in Sioux Lookout Zone (SLZ) and Moose Factory Zone (MFZ)
- Antivirals are covered by Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program and is now open benefit
- Plans for relief teams of health care providers are being set up to ensure there is sufficient surge capacity in each zone

# Actions to date

- Health Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care are committed to protecting the health of First Nations in Ontario
  - Health Canada (First Nations and Inuit Health) is the lead agency for H1N1 in First Nations communities
  - Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has and will continue to support where needed
- Both health agencies have been working collaboratively to ensure the health care response to this situation serves the best interests of First Nations communities in Ontario
- We encourage an open dialogue with First Nations leadership to address issues associated with the health response to H1N1

## Actions to date (continued)

- Health Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care have collaborated on a number of actions to respond to H1N1 in First Nations communities:
  1. Deployed antiviral medications to First Nations communities across the North to support early treatment of individuals who are sick with the flu
  2. Developed science-based guidance for health workers in First Nations communities on treating individuals with the flu
  3. Ensured local health agencies in other parts of Ontario are prepared to treat First Nations who seek care outside of the First Nations community
  4. Maintained confidentiality of case counts and communities affected, per request of Chiefs of Ontario

# Looking Forward – Preparations for the Fall

- Expected to see more flu activity in the Fall when flu season begins
- Preparations underway to ensure First Nations communities are prepared:
  - Assessment of 133 Ontario First Nations communities to determine preparedness measures needed (e.g. pre-positioning of supplies, etc)
  - H1N1 surveillance to support early detection and identification of cases
  - Ready access to antiviral medications to support early treatment of cases
  - Guidance on public health measures to be developed based on unique circumstances of First Nations communities
  - On-going collaboration between Health Canada, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and local health agencies

# Looking Forward – Preparations for the Fall

- **What You Can Do as Leader**
- Revisit and update your pandemic plan
- Make sure all supplies needed are identified and any gaps communicated to your Zone Program Manager so that orders and shipping can be arranged
- Promote good public health practices (go on the radio)
- Consider postponing or cancelling large social gatherings in the community if you have cases OR use community events to promote good public health practice and distribution of information materials