



## H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Flu) – FACTS UPDATED September 2009

### What is the H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu)?

H1N1 flu virus is a new human flu virus which causes respiratory illness in people, affecting the nose, throat and lungs. It is called pandemic flu because it is a new strain of flu virus that humans have no natural immunity to and because it has spread quickly to many people all over the world, since it was first identified in April 2009.

### What are the symptoms?

- Almost always: Cough and fever
- Common: Fatigue, Muscle aches, sore throat, headache, decreased appetite, runny nose
- Sometimes: Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea

Once you are infected, symptoms usually develop within 2 to 7 days. Most cases are mild and people recover well on their own at home, with full recovery within 1 to 2 weeks.

### How is it spread?

- Through coughing or sneezing. This releases germs into the air that can be breathed in by others.
- When you touch hard surfaces such as counters, doorknobs that are contaminated by the influenza virus, and then touch our mouth or nose.
- You can NOT get H1N1 flu from eating or preparing pork products.

### When is the H1N1 flu virus contagious?

A person can infect others with the H1N1 flu virus from one day before symptoms start, to 7 days after symptoms start.

### What should I do if I feel sick?

- If you are otherwise healthy, stay home if you have flu-like symptoms. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- If you are pregnant or have underlying medical conditions and develop flu-like symptoms, call or visit your health care provider as soon as possible, and seek medical care if your symptoms worsen.
- If you have any of the symptoms below, see a health care provider right away:
  - difficulty breathing or feeling short of breath
  - chest pain
  - vomiting that is severe or doesn't stop
  - high fever for more than 2 days in adults
  - severe tiredness in children
  - confusion or difficulty waking any ill person

### Who is at higher risk?

- **Young adults, children and babies** are most likely to get the H1N1 flu. Most cases are mild, but a small number of people, including healthy young adults, have needed intensive care in hospital for H1N1 flu or have even died. This makes H1N1 flu different from seasonal flu, which mostly affects older people.
- **Pregnant women and people with underlying disease** are at higher risk of severe illness, if they are infected with H1N1.
- **Many First Nations people belong to higher risk groups** for H1N1 infection and severe illness. This is because First Nations communities tend to have many young adults and children, pregnant women, and people with underlying diseases. Living in remote or isolated communities, and living in impoverished or overcrowded conditions, also places many First Nations people at higher risk.

### What is the difference between vaccines and antivirals?

**Vaccines** prevent influenza. They give you immunity to specific diseases by telling your body to make antibodies.

**Antivirals** are drugs used for early treatment of influenza, and in special cases for prevention. They do not make you immune to the virus, but they can reduce the severity and length of illness. Most people are recovering well from H1N1 flu on their own at home, so this flu season antivirals will be used for early treatment only for those who need it.

### When will this year's flu vaccines be ready?

This flu season, there will be two flu vaccines offered in Ontario:

- People aged 65 and over, and those living in long term care facilities, will be offered the seasonal flu vaccine in October. Everyone else aged 6 months and over will be offered the seasonal flu vaccine in December or January, to give them a chance to get the H1N1 vaccine first.
- People aged 6 months and over will be offered the H1N1 flu vaccine starting in November.

The seasonal flu vaccine will NOT protect against the H1N1 flu virus.

### Who should be tested for the H1N1 flu virus?

Only those in higher risk groups, or those with severe illness that are admitted to hospital, should be routinely tested for the H1N1 flu virus.

### What actions can I take to protect myself and others?

- If possible, avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Cough and sneeze in your arm or sleeve.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, or hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Get your H1N1 flu shot when it becomes available