



# Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

## Guidance on Public Health Measures for the Pandemic H1N1 Influenza Virus in First Nation Communities

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### Background

Every fall there is some kind of flu going around. But this year it's a different flu season – with the new pandemic H1N1 influenza virus as well as seasonal flu viruses circulating.

Here are some facts about H1N1 influenza:

- H1N1 influenza is a new version of the flu virus.
- The symptoms of the H1N1 flu virus are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu. They include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have also reported diarrhea and vomiting with H1N1 flu.
- H1N1 flu spreads like any other flu virus, mainly from person to person through coughing, sneezing, or direct contact (touching). People can become infected by touching objects or surfaces with flu viruses on them and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes.
- Infected people may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 days after becoming sick.
- Children and people who are very ill may be able to infect others for up to 10 days. That means that individuals may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before

### Highlights

This document aims to provide guidance to First Nations communities on public health measures that can be used to control the spread of the H1N1 flu. It provides:

- Steps that can be taken to stop the spread of flu within households and the community
- Advice on postponing or continuing with large gatherings

they know they are sick, as well as while they are sick.

First Nation community members may have more risk of becoming seriously ill from H1N1 because of risk factors, including:

- **Health conditions** – such as diabetes and high rates of pregnancy. These pre-existing health conditions place people at higher risk of serious illness from H1N1 flu.
- **More young people** – In general, there are more young people in First Nation communities compared with the rest of the Ontario population (46% of the Aboriginal population in Ontario are

under age 25). Younger people seem to get H1N1 flu more easily than older people.

- **Environmental conditions** – In some First Nation communities, there may be many individuals/extended family members living together in one house which makes it easier for people to pass the H1N1 flu virus to each other. Also, in some communities it may be more difficult to access clean water, making it hard for individuals to clean their hands with soap and water and to clean their homes properly.
- **Social factors** – There may be a lot of travel between some First Nation communities, as well as large gatherings of people that may spread the H1N1 flu virus.

As much as possible, First Nation communities need to think about these factors when developing plans to prevent the spread of the H1N1 flu virus in their communities.

### **Recommended Public Health Measures**

Public health measures are non-medical activities that can help slow down the spread of viruses. The following are some important public health measures that First Nation communities can use to help stop the spread of the H1N1 flu virus.

**1. Hand hygiene** - One of the best ways to stay healthy and prevent the spread of the H1N1 flu is to encourage people to wash their hands often. It is especially important for everyone to wash their hands after touching anything that a sick person has touched (such as dishes, towels, clothes and trash); before they eat; and before touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

When clean water is available, people should use soap and water to clean their hands.

When clean water is not available, people can clean their hands using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60-90% alcohol. If the person's hands are visibly dirty and there is no clean water available, he/she

should use a wet towelette to wipe the dirt off before using the alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

**2. Sneeze and cough etiquette** - Teach all community members how to sneeze and cough properly. They should cover their mouth with a tissue and then throw away the tissue and clean their hands, or they should sneeze/cough into their sleeve and then wash their hands.

Encouraging key members of the community (such as elders, band council members, health workers, teachers and others) to sneeze and cough properly will provide a good example for other community members.

**3. Isolate sick people** - Where practical, try to keep people who are sick with the flu in one area of the home away from other family members. Weather-permitting, windows should remain open to facilitate air flow through the home.

If the First Nation community has identified a Flu Assessment/ Treatment Centre in its pandemic plan that has the ability to keep people overnight, sick people could go to this location until they feel better in order to reduce the spread of the flu virus to healthy people.

**4. Identify one caregiver** - If possible, have only one adult in the home provide care for ill people. The ill person should not have visitors other than his/her caregiver.

If possible, do not choose people at increased risk of severe illness from the flu as caregivers, such as individuals who have diabetes, heart problems, problems with breathing, or pregnant women.

Caregivers should always clean their hands after providing care to an ill person, including after touching anything that the ill person has touched (such as door knobs).

**3. Use a surgical mask** - If people who live in crowded houses get sick with the flu, they may want to wear a surgical mask when

other people are close by (less than 2 metres) in order to prevent the spread of the flu virus.

If an ill individual does not have a mask, consider other options. Covering the sick person's nose and mouth with a clean piece of material or bandana could provide protection when he/she is close to other people. The material or bandana should be laundered after each use.

#### **4. Alternative sleeping arrangements -**

Consider using alternate sleeping arrangements to separate ill individuals from well individuals within the home.

If it's not possible to arrange alternative sleeping arrangements, arrange beds in shared rooms so that people lie head to toe and consider creating temporary physical barriers between beds using sheets, curtains, or other barriers.

**5. Personal hygiene products -** Sick people should use their own towel, face cloth, toothbrush, and other personal hygiene items. These items should not be shared.

**6. Regular house cleaning -** Flu viruses can live outside of the body for up to 2 days on surfaces. When there are ill individuals in a house, caregivers should clean door knobs and light switches with regular household cleaning products at least once a day. No special cleaning products are required for influenza; regular household cleaning products will work.

**7. Consider stockpiling supplies and equipment -** Families need to be prepared for a potential outbreak of the H1N1 flu in their community. Where possible, consider encouraging families to have a stock of non-medical supplies that will help them take care of ill family members, such as cleaning supplies, soap, tissues, etc.

**8. Consider canceling or postponing large gatherings -** When healthy individuals mix with sick people in a closed, confined space, the H1N1 flu virus can spread and more

people can get sick. When planning a large gathering, if there are a lot of people who are sick in the community or in neighbouring communities who may be coming to the event, the Chief and Band Council may consider cancelling or postponing the event.

The Chief and Band Council are encouraged to use the *First Nations Risk Assessment Tool for Large Gatherings* (see page 5 of this document) to help decide whether or not to continue with the large gathering. This decision should be done in consultation with the band council members, health workers, Political-Territorial Organization/ Independent First Nation, the Community Health Centre and/or local public health unit.

After doing a risk assessment, if the Chief and Band Council decide to continue holding the large gathering, the organizers of the event can take the following simple steps to help stop the spread of flu viruses during the influenza season:

- Ask attendees/participants to stay home if they feel unwell.
- Ask people from communities with outbreaks to stay home.
- Put up signs and make announcements at the gathering to tell people to:
  - Clean their hands often, either washing with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
  - Practice cough and sneeze etiquette (i.e., coughing into a tissue or sleeve and then cleaning their hands).
  - Go home from the gathering if they start to feel sick.
- Ensure instructions on how to clean hands properly are available. Ensure facilities for washing hands and/or alcohol-based hand sanitizers are available at the gathering.

**9. Provide guidance to schools and child care centres -** Schools and child care centres need to receive guidance on how to keep children healthy and safe. This is especially important because children have an increased chance of getting sick with H1N1 flu.

As well, there may be situations when schools and child care centres may be temporarily closed. The community should plan for how they would care for children if this needs to happen.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has produced guidance documents for schools and child care settings that are available at [ontario.ca/flu](http://ontario.ca/flu). Click on the link to “Health Care Professionals” on the left-hand menu and scroll down the page to view the documents under “Education Settings.” Or contact your local public health unit and/or First Nations and Inuit Health representative for more information.

#### **Additional Information**

- Contact First Nations and Inuit Health’s H1N1 Toll Free Hotline at 1-877-365-3623 (9am to 6pm EST, seven days a week)
- Visit the Ontario First Nations Pandemic website at [www.pandemic.knet.ca](http://www.pandemic.knet.ca)
- Contact the Chiefs of Ontario or your Political/Territorial Organization
- Contact your local public health unit
- Visit the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s H1N1 website at [ontario.ca/flu](http://ontario.ca/flu)
- Visit the Ontario Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs H1N1 website at [www.aboriginalaffairs.gov.on.ca/services/health.asp](http://www.aboriginalaffairs.gov.on.ca/services/health.asp)

## First Nations Risk Assessment Tool for Large Gatherings

It is important to weigh the risks of spreading the H1N1 flu virus at large gatherings against the benefits of holding the event. This tool was developed to assist the Chief and Band Council decide whether or not to hold a large gathering.

Information about the gathering	
Type of gathering (e.g., sporting event, pow wow):	
Age group involved in the gathering (e.g., Chiefs meeting, teen sporting event):	
Date(s) of gathering:	
Number of participants:	
Where will people be traveling from?	
Where will the gathering be held (e.g., community hall, outdoors)?	
Where will visiting participants sleep/stay in the community?	

Assessment of risk	Circle the best answer
Q1. Has an outbreak of flu been declared or are there many people sick with the flu in the host community?	Yes /No
Q2. Has an outbreak of flu been declared or are there many people sick with the flu in any of the communities that will be sending participants to the event?	Yes /No
Q3. Will people be spending many hours close together indoors (i.e., less than 2 meters apart from each other)?	Yes /No
Q4. Will there be substantial community impact or economic loss if the event were cancelled or rescheduled?	Yes /No
Q5. Can the event be held another way (e.g., teleconference, radio, Internet)?	Yes/No
Q6. Can the event be held outdoors?	Yes/No

If the answer is “Yes” to questions 1 and 2, you may want to consider canceling or postponing the event. The decision to cancel the event should be made by the Chief and Band Council in consultation with health workers serving the community, Political-Territorial Organization/ Independent First Nations, the Community Health Centre and/or local public health unit.