
INFORMATION BULLETIN

Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport
Ministry of Health Services

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H1N1 FLU VIRUS (HUMAN SWINE FLU) UNDER SURVEILLANCE

Update: 12 p.m. PST, May 4, 2009

VICTORIA – British Columbia continues to monitor and respond to the recent spread of the novel H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu). Ten additional cases have been confirmed today for a total of 39 in British Columbia. The individuals have either recovered or are recovering. All of the cases have been relatively mild.

How can I stop the spread of the H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu)?

- Experts have determined that the H1N1 flu virus can spread from human to human. However, they have not yet determined how easily the virus spreads between people.
- **Stay home** from work or school if you are sick, regardless of where you have travelled, unless directed to seek medical care. Limit contact with others.
- See a health care provider if your symptoms become worse but call ahead to let them know you have fever or cough illness.
- Exercise commonsense precautionary measures:
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. When you cough, do so into your sleeve if possible.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze.

How many cases of the H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu) are there in B.C.?

- BC Centre for Disease Control has confirmed 39 individuals in British Columbia so far have tested positive for the H1N1 flu (human swine flu) virus that has caused illness in the U.S., Mexico and several other countries. Specimens are also tested at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg.
- British Columbia's confirmed cases include:
 - Fourteen in Fraser Health;
 - Two in Interior Health;
 - Five in Northern Health.
 - Twelve in Vancouver Coastal Health; and
 - Six on Vancouver Island.
- Clinicians and public health partners across the province have increased vigilance and will continue to report unusual clusters or cases of severe respiratory illnesses, particularly in travellers returning from Mexico or the United States.

Current status of outbreak

- The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that the situation is evolving quickly with more cases, hospitalizations and deaths expected in the coming weeks and months.
- The most current Canadian numbers of confirmed cases are available at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine-porcine/surveillance-eng.php>.

- The most current U.S. numbers of confirmed cases are available at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/index.htm>.
- The most current international numbers of confirmed cases are available at <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/updates/en/index.html>.
- The WHO has raised the level of influenza pandemic alert to phase 5, meaning there is human-to-human spread of the virus into at least two countries in one WHO region. Phase 6 would indicate a full-fledged global pandemic of influenza.

What is H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu)?

- The H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu) virus is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza virus that regularly causes outbreaks of flu in pigs.
- Swine influenza symptoms in people can be similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza infection and include fever, cough, headache, general aches and fatigue. Some people with swine flu have also reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

How do people get the H1N1 flu (human swine flu) virus?

- Human infections with flu viruses from pigs can occur when people are in close proximity to infected pigs, such as in pig production barns and livestock exhibits at fairs. Human-to-human transmission is also possible.
- Influenza and other respiratory infections are transmitted from person to person via the respiratory route. Coughs and sneezes release the germs into the air where they can be breathed in by others.
- Germs rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system when someone touches their mouth and/or nose.

Are masks effective in preventing the spread of the H1N1 flu virus?

- The H1N1 flu virus is spread from person to person usually through respiratory droplets, from someone that is coughing or sneezing. Influenza is not airborne.
- The wearing of masks by affected persons will limit their ability to spread the virus and caregivers in the home might also benefit. However, the use by the general public in public, though a feature of many outbreaks, remains unproven.
- A mask on its own may not be enough to stop the spread. The best thing is to do is to cover your nose and mouth with a disposable tissue when you sneeze and wash your hands often with soap and water. It's the simplest and most effective way to prevent spreading the virus.
- For health professionals who are managing H1N1 flu cases in health-care facilities, N95 respirators are recommended for specific situations. Surgical masks are recommended for health-care workers as part of the national PHAC guidelines.

Can I get the H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu) from eating pork?

- No. The H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu) is not a food safety concern.
- Proper cooking of pork products would kill any viruses. Additionally, swine exhibiting symptoms of influenza would not pass tests to enter into the food market.

What if I have returned from travelling and have symptoms of a respiratory illness?

- If you have recently been to Mexico, the U.S. or any other region where H1N1 flu cases are being reported, and are exhibiting symptoms of respiratory illness with fever, you should get in contact with your health care professional to discuss your symptoms. Make sure to tell your health care professional about your travel history.

Will government be issuing a travel advisory?

- PHAC has issued a travel health warning for Mexico. Travellers from Canada are recommended to postpone elective or non-essential travel to Mexico until further notice.
- PHAC issued a separate travel health notice regarding swine flu in the United States and will provide updates as more information becomes available.
- The WHO is monitoring the situation closely.
- Travellers should follow the same precautionary measures that are recommended to protect against seasonal influenza –practising frequent handwashing, covering coughs and sneezes, and staying home when ill. Since seasonal influenza continues across the world, for those with high risk conditions travelling anywhere in the world, a flu shot will help protect against illness due to human influenza viruses. However, it is not expected to protect against swine influenza.

Where I can find more information?

- Factsheets, resources and updates on the H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu) are available at www.gov.bc.ca/swineflu.
- Public can call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 or visit www.healthlinkbc.ca, 24 hours a day/seven days a week if they have questions/concerns, or if feeling ill.
- Learn how to protect yourself against flu at <http://fightflu.ca/index-eng.html>.
- The travel health warning for Mexico issued by PHAC can be found at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/2009/hsf-mexico-090427-eng.php>.
- The travel health notice for the United States issued by PHAC can be found at http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/2009/swine_flu_cal-tex-090427-eng.php.

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