Pandemic Influenza Preparedness

# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

August 21, 2009

Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport
Ministry of Health Services
Ministry of Education

## FOR STUDENTS: H1N1 AND BACK-TO-SCHOOL

British Columbia continues to monitor the H1N1 flu virus situation in the province. Many cases have been confirmed in British Columbia and the vast majority of these patients have either recovered or are recovering.

**Q: What are the symptoms of the H1N1 flu virus?**

- The symptoms of the H1N1 flu virus are similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal influenza and include high fever, cough, headache, general aches, sore throat, fatigue, eye pain, shortness of breath and lack of appetite.

- Some people with the H1N1 flu have also reported runny nose, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

**Q: How does it spread?**

- Like seasonal flu, the H1N1 flu virus is mainly spread person-to-person through droplets from coughing or sneezing by people infected with the influenza virus.

- People may become infected by touching something with flu viruses or germs on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Germs on hard surfaces, such as counters and doorknobs, can be picked up on hands and spread to the respiratory system when people touch their mouth or nose.

**Q: Someone coughed on me. Will I get sick?**

- Flu viruses can be spread by coughing or sneezing, but just being coughed on doesn't mean you will get the H1N1 flu virus.

- If you start to have flu-like symptoms (cough, fever, headache, general aches and fatigue) the best thing you can do to protect yourself and others is to stay home from school and daycare and stay away from other people until they are feeling better and able to fully participate in normal activities.

- Make sure to wash your hands often with soap and warm water; especially after you cough or sneeze and before you eat.

- If you feel sick, let your parents know and stay home from school. If your symptoms get worse, you can call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1. If they persist, phone your health care provider before going to the clinic.

**Q: Is it deadly? Should I be worried?**

- The World Health Organization still considers the H1N1 pandemic to be one of moderate severity which means that most people recover without hospitalization and this is what has been seen in Canada so far

- So far, illness caused by the H1N1 flu virus is not very different from regular seasonal influenza, although it does appear to affect younger age groups more than seasonal flu.

- Like seasonal flu, H1N1 influenza can cause serious illness or even death in people who have other medical conditions. Young children, pregnant women and people with chronic diseases like asthma, diabetes, or heart disease, may be at higher risk for severe disease or complications from this infection.

- Be assured that the public health service and health care providers are working hard to limit the spread of the disease and help people who may become ill.

**Q: What can I do to protect myself and others?**

- Here are some practical ways you can help prevent the spread of infection:
    - Wash your hands frequently, especially before eating and after coughing or sneezing;
    - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth;
    - Don't share the same cup or share utensils with other people;
    - Sneeze into a tissue instead of your hands and then throw the tissue away; if you don't have a tissue cough or sneeze into your sleeve rather than your bare hands and
    - Tell your parents if you don't feel well, and stay home from school if you are sick.

**Q: Will wearing a mask help?**

- Masks haven't been proven to help protect you from the H1N1 flu virus.

- If you do have to travel outside the home while you have flu symptoms, wearing a simple surgical mask will help protect **others** from your coughing.

- The best way to avoid getting sick is to practice good hygiene and cleanliness and to avoid contact with people who are sick.

**Q: If kids get sick at my school, will the school be closed?**

- In general, public health officials in B.C. do not expect that schools will be closed due to the H1N1 flu virus.

- Closing schools hasn't been shown to be useful for controlling the spread and impact of the H1N1 flu virus.

- If there are unusual circumstances that call for a school to be closed, the decision would be made by the local Medical Health Officer in consultation with the Provincial Health Officer and local school district.

**Q: Is there a cure for the H1N1 flu virus?**

- There is a medication, called an antiviral, which can help treat the symptoms of the virus especially if it is taken right away when someone gets sick.

- The best treatment for most people is to drink plenty of fluids and rest; it may also be helpful to take medications for fever.

- The H1N1 flu vaccine will be available in B.C. in November to everyone who needs and wants it. The vaccine can help prevent people from getting sick with the H1N1 flu virus.

- It is still important to take common sense precautions to prevent the spread of this or any other flu virus

**Q: Where can I go for more information?**

- You can call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1, 24 hours a day/seven days a week to speak to a nurse if you have more questions or are concerned about any illness/symptoms you may experience.

- For the latest facts on the H1N1 flu virus, including back-to-school information, visit www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1.

Find us on twitter

Find us on Facebook

-30-