



Hamilton

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## Pandemic H1N1 (2009)

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### What is Pandemic H1N1 (2009)?

Pandemic H1N1 (2009) or pH1N1 virus (also known as novel H1N1 and swine flu) is a respiratory illness passed from person to person. The pandemic H1N1 flu virus was first identified in April 2009. Since that time it has infected people worldwide.

### What are the signs and symptoms?

Symptoms begin from 1 to 4 days after the virus enters the body. Symptoms of pH1N1 are similar to seasonal flu. They include fever, cough and sore throat with headache, chills, nasal congestion, appetite loss, muscle aches, and fatigue. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may occur, more often in children. In severe cases complications such as pneumonia may develop.

### Is it contagious?

Yes. A person can spread pH1N1 starting **1 day before** he or she feels sick. People can continue to pass the virus to others for up to **7-10 days after onset** of symptoms.

### How is it spread?

Just like seasonal influenza, pandemic H1N1 influenza is spread through respiratory droplets. The virus is released when a person who is infected

with the virus coughs, sneezes, or speaks and sends out virus particles. The virus enters the nose, throat, or lungs of another person and begins to multiply, eventually causing symptoms.

The virus can survive on environmental surfaces and on hands, so pH1N1 influenza may also be spread when a person touches a surface that has viruses on it – a door handle, for instance – and then touches his or her nose or mouth.

### How can I protect myself?

**Wash your hands:** Wash hands often with soap and warm water, especially after you cough or sneeze. If hand-washing facilities are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

**Practice good hygiene:** Cough and sneeze into your sleeve instead of into your hands. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

**Stay home when ill:** Do not go to school or work if you develop signs and symptoms of illness such as fever, cough, sore throat, headache, lack of appetite, fatigue, vomiting or diarrhea. If you become ill at work/school you should go home and not return until feeling better.

**Keep the environment clean:** Since H1N1 flu virus can survive on surfaces, cleaning and disinfecting commonly touched surfaces such as light switches, door handles, computer keyboards and remote controls will assist in preventing spread of illness.

**Do not share items:** Do not share food, beverages and other personal items such as utensils, lip products or toothbrushes.

**Avoid close contact with ill people.**

**Contact your health care provider, if necessary:** If symptoms worsen, seek medical attention. Adults and children with underlying medical conditions, adults over the age of 65 and children under the age of 5 years, as well as pregnant women who develop symptoms should contact a health care provider. Do not use aspirin products for children due to a possible association with Reye's Syndrome, a rare and life threatening illness.

**What if someone at work is infected? Can they come back to work? Is it safe for me?**

A person should not be at work if she/he is ill with "influenza-like illness", which includes the symptoms of fever and cough accompanied by any of sore throat, muscle aches, fatigue, congestion or headache. A person should not return to work until their fever has gone away and they are feeling better. It is safe to go to work in a place where there was once an ill person. Taking reasonable precautions such as not sharing personal items and food, washing hands often, keeping the environment clean and coughing into your sleeve as well as not touching your

nose or eyes are the best defence against illness transmission.

**I am pregnant. Should I be concerned?**

Pregnant women are not more likely to get the flu. However, if they are infected with pH1N1 flu virus, they are more likely to suffer complications. Severe complications from the flu could lead to early delivery or miscarriage.

It's recommended that pregnant women be vigilant with hand hygiene, as well as other infection control measures to reduce the risk that they will pick up the virus.

Pregnant women should speak to a medical professional if they develop flu symptoms, and seek medical care if the symptoms worsen.

**Is there a vaccine?**

The pH1N1 vaccine will likely be approved for use in Canada in November 2009. There will be enough vaccine available for all Canadians who want and need the vaccine. The vaccine will be prioritized so that those who need it most will receive the vaccine first.

**Where can I find more information?**

City of Hamilton Public Health Services:  
[www.hamilton.ca/pandemic](http://www.hamilton.ca/pandemic) or 905-546-2063

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care:  
[www.health.gov.on.ca](http://www.health.gov.on.ca)

Public Health Agency of Canada:  
[www.phac.gc.ca](http://www.phac.gc.ca)

World Health Organization:  
[www.who.int](http://www.who.int)