

2009 H1N1 (Human Swine Influenza)

Information for the Public

May 8, 2009

What is the H1N1 flu (Swine Flu)?

The H1N1 influenza virus (swine flu) is a virus that causes respiratory disease in pigs. It may also make people sick. Symptoms are similar to the common flu and may include fever, cough, headache, general aches and fatigue. Some people have also reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. In BC, patients with H1N1 flu have had symptoms similar to the seasonal flu.

How is the H1N1 flu spread?

The flu is caused by viruses, and is generally spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus in the cough/sneeze droplets can be passed to the next person by landing on them or on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where it can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system by touching the mouth and/or nose. This is why it is really important to wash your hands frequently.

What do I do if I think I am sick with the H1N1 flu?

If you have a fever or cough, regardless of whether you have traveled to areas known to have H1N1 Influenza, stay at home from work or school for at least seven days from the start of your symptoms. Limit contact with other people so you don't infect them. Call HealthLink BC (phone number: 811) for information and advice.

See a health care provider only if your symptoms become worse. Call ahead before you go to a clinic or hospital to let them know you are coming in, and that you have a fever or cough.

What should I do if I've been in contact with someone who has the H1N1 flu?

Watch for symptoms, including fever and a new cough, for 10 days. If you're not feeling sick, you do not need to see a doctor or take medications. If you begin to feel sick, follow the steps outlined above.

Is there any treatment for H1N1 flu?

Generally, only people who have moderate to severe symptoms of the illness will receive treatment with medications such as Tamiflu. Severity of symptoms is determined through a medical assessment. It is also not necessary to test everyone even if there is a suspicion that they might have H1N1 Influenza.

If you do have a nasal swab taken, this will be sent to the laboratory in Vancouver. It generally takes 48 hours to receive your results, but this can take longer if the laboratory is dealing with a large number of swabs at the same time. If your results are positive, the BC Centre for Disease Control will notify your physician, who will notify you.

Do I need to wear a mask?

If you are not ill, you do not need to wear a mask in public areas. If you have symptoms (e.g. coughing, sneezing), you will be asked to wear a mask in places such as doctors' offices, walk-in clinics and emergency rooms. The mask should cover your mouth and nose, with the straps looped over your ears to hold the mask in place.

How do I stop the spread of the H1N1 flu?

- Stay at home when you're sick or have flu symptoms.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze, then throw the tissue into the trash.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper arm or sleeve.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers, especially after you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, as germs can spread that way.