

H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) Q and A for Families with School Aged Children

What is H1N1 flu virus (human swine influenza)?

This virus which was previously called “swine flu” is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to those of the regular human seasonal flu. The symptoms may include fever, fatigue, lack of appetite, coughing and sore throat. Some people with this virus have also reported vomiting and diarrhea.

Is this virus contagious? How does it spread between people?

The virus is believed to be spread in the same manner as seasonal influenza: person to person mainly by “droplet spread.” This happens when droplets from a cough or sneeze are released into the air and then are breathed in by others who are less than six (6) feet away. The virus can also be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets in another person or an object and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands. The virus can live outside the body on hard surfaces for up to 48 hours. However it should be noted that the virus is easily killed by hand washing with warm water and soap, or with hand sanitizer. Household disinfectants will kill the virus on household items and surfaces.

Will the school be closed if there is a case of H1N1 flu virus (human swine influenza)?

Public health officials will consider each situation, but at this time school closures will not occur for this virus, just as schools would not close for seasonal influenza. It is not felt that this measure is necessary at this time.

Should my child stay home?

Children who are healthy are expected to go to school. There is no reason to withdraw children.

What are you doing to protect my child?

A person diagnosed with this virus will be away from school until 24 hours after their symptoms are gone or for seven (7) days following illness onset, whichever is longer. This will prevent transmission of the virus to other students.

The Halton Region Health Department recommends that staff and students take these steps to prevent themselves and others from becoming ill:

- Wash you hands often for at least 15 seconds with soap and water
- Sneeze and cough into your upper sleeve
- Stay at home if you are ill
- See your health care provider if you or your child are experiencing severe influenza-like symptoms.

Hands should be washed:

- after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose
- after using the bathroom
- after shaking hands
- before eating and/or preparing food
- before touching your face
- when you or someone you come into contact with is sick.

Schools should follow usual practices which include:

- Send children with symptoms of illness home and advise to stay home until well;
- Remind students daily of the importance of regular, thorough hand washing and good personal hygiene; and
- Encourage students to avoid sharing food, beverages and other personal items.

Should children, returning from travel to Mexico or other areas affected by H1N1 flu virus (human swine influenza) be asked to remain at home?

If students are well, then they should continue to go to school. As usual, if students exhibit symptoms of illness, parents are called and advised to have students stay home until they are well. They are also advised to contact their health care providers at that time.

I think my child has been in contact with someone who was ill with this virus. What do I do?

If your child is feeling well, he or she continue to go to school and participate in regular activities. There is no need to be under “quarantine.” The incubation period is the time that elapses between exposure to the virus and the appearance of symptoms. The incubation period for seasonal influenza is one (1) to three (3) days. For this H1N1 flu virus (human swine influenza), it is not fully known yet, and so, public health is advising people to watch their health for seven (7) days after exposure.

Are there any medications available to prevent this flu?

Antiviral medications are not recommended for persons not showing symptoms to prevent the spread of this virus. Antiviral medications may be recommended by a health care provider for treatment of certain persons diagnosed with this virus.

Should students wear masks at school?

There is no health reason for wearing masks. We are concerned about the fear and panic that may result from the wearing of masks, especially among young children. Parents who feel strongly about wanting their children to wear masks should discuss this with their school administrator. The Public Health Agency of Canada does not recommend that members of the general public wear masks to protect against contracting the

H1N1 flu virus. Evidence shows that this is not an effective public health measure.

What measures are caretakers taking to disinfect schools?

Caretakers will continue to provide thorough and effective cleaning and disinfecting of schools as part of their routine duties. No enhanced cleaning or disinfecting is currently recommended.

Will the flu shot I got this year protect me?

There are many types of influenza viruses. It is unlikely that the seasonal flu shot will provide protection against this H1N1 flu virus (human swine influenza).

Are drinking fountains being turned off?

No. Regular practices and preparations should be followed. Avoid touching the spout of drinking fountains.

Are breakfast programs, hot lunch programs and other activities involving food being cancelled?

Breakfast programs and hot lunch programs can continue as usual.

Will clubs and extra-curricular activities be cancelled?

Extra-curricular activities will continue at this time.

Who can I talk to if I have more questions?

If you need more information about influenza, please call the Halton Region Health Department at 905-825-6000 or TeleHealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000, TTY 1-866-797-0007.

The following websites have sections dedicated to H1N1 flu virus (human swine influenza) information.

- Halton Region: www.halton.ca
- Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca
- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care: www.health.gov.on.ca
- Centre for Disease Control (CDC): www.cdc.gov
- World Health Organization (WHO): www.who.int

Halton Region

Dial 311 or 905-825-6000
Toll free 1-866-4HALTON (1-866-442-5866)
TTY 905-827-9833
www.halton.ca

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