



H1N1 Influenza Virus (Human Swine Influenza)

What is H1N1 influenza virus?

The H1N1 influenza virus (human swine influenza or human swine flu) is a respiratory disease of humans caused by type A influenza virus. This particular strain has originated in swine, although it is now transmitted between people. Contact with swine is no longer a concern.

How does H1N1 influenza virus spread?

Spread of H1N1 influenza virus also called H1N1 flu virus from person to person occurs in the same way as seasonal flu, which is mainly spread person to person through 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. It is important to wash your hands frequently.

How can H1N1 flu virus be prevented?

You can reduce the risk of getting any influenza strain, including the H1N1 flu virus, by taking standard precautionary measures.

- Wash your hands or clean them with alcohol-based hand rubs frequently, especially after you cough or sneeze and before you eat.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a clean tissue when you cough or sneeze, and throw the tissue in the trash immediately after you use it.
- Cough and sneeze into your sleeve.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, as infection can spread that way.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you get sick, stay at home and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

What are the symptoms of human swine flu?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu virus or human swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of typical human seasonal influenza. Symptoms include high fever, cough, sore throat, headache, body aches, chills, fatigue, eye pain, shortness of breath, and lack of appetite. Some people with human swine flu have also reported nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Symptoms or complications such as severe respiratory distress or pneumonia may develop in moderate or severe cases, as well as people with chronic health conditions.

What to do if you or your child has symptoms?

In most adults and children, the symptoms of H1N1 flu virus or human swine flu are similar to the symptoms of regular flu. If you or your child gets sick, you can take these steps to feel better.

- Children and adults who are sick should stay at home. Do not send children to school or daycare.
- Drink lots of fluids (juice, water, Pedialyte).
- Get plenty of rest.
- Keep your child comfortable.
- For fever, sore throat, and muscle aches, you can use fever-reducing medicines that your doctor recommends based on your child's age. Do not use aspirin with children or teenagers; it can cause Reye's syndrome, a life-threatening illness.
- Keep clean tissues and a trash bag close, and throw the tissue in the trash immediately after you use it.
- Wash your hands frequently.
- A person who is sick should recover in his or her own room as much as possible.
- If someone in your home is sick, keep the person away from those who are not sick.

You can call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 if you have symptoms or concerns, and speak to a nurse anytime of the day or night.

What is home isolation?

You or your child may require home isolation if you have an infectious illness such as influenza or flu. The influenza virus is contagious for 24 hours before symptoms start and for about 7 days after symptoms start. You should stay at home or in isolation for 7 days even if your symptoms get better and your fever has gone.

Isolation means staying at home and not going to work, school, or other public places. While at home, the person who is sick should stay isolated or away from other household members and other people as much as possible.

You stay at home and away from people to prevent spreading influenza to others. It also gives you time to recover. You should recover in your own room as much as possible. Keep a 2 metre (6 feet) distance when contact with other household members is unavoidable. Everyone should wash their hands often, using soap and warm water.

How can human infections with H1N1 flu virus be diagnosed?

Identification of human swine influenza A virus requires sending a specimen from the infected person to the provincial laboratories at the BC Centre for Disease Control for testing. To diagnose swine influenza A infection, a respiratory specimen would need to be collected generally within the first 4 to 5 days of illness, during the time when an infected person most likely sheds the virus. Some people, especially children, may shed the virus for 10 days or longer. People with mild illness do not need to have a test done and should not go to their doctor for this. If you are unsure whether you need to see a doctor, call HealthLink BC at 811.

What medications are available to treat H1N1 flu virus infections?

Currently, antiviral drugs prescribed by doctors can be used for early treatment of the illness in certain people who may be at risk of more severe disease. In the event that experts determine that more extensive use of antiviral medication is recommended both Canada and B.C. have purchased an advance supply of antivirals and have committed to purchasing more if needed as part of an emergency public health response.

Is there a vaccine for H1N1 flu virus?

Experts are working internationally to develop a vaccine that will protect persons from this particular strain of influenza. However, the seasonal influenza vaccine is recommended for individuals to offer protection against the seasonal strains that may be circulating, regardless of whether a novel strain has emerged.

Canada has a contract with a manufacturer to research and produce a vaccine for an influenza pandemic virus once it is identified, so production can start as soon as possible.

When should I contact a doctor or health care provider?

You can call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 if you have symptoms or concerns, and speak to a nurse anytime of the day or night.

If you need to see your doctor or health care provider, call ahead and report your symptoms so appropriate precautions can be taken.

Individuals with no flu symptoms can continue with their regular daily activities, including going to work or school, whether or not they have travelled in a country or been in contact with someone who has travelled where H1N1 flu virus or human swine flu has been reported.



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