

# ***KFL&A Public Health Communications Update***

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## ***Pandemic H1N1 Influenza Virus: Frequently Asked Questions for KFL&A Residents***

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**Q. What is pandemic H1N1 influenza and human swine flu?**

A. Swine flu and human swine flu are some of the names previously used in the media for a new strain of influenza virus—pandemic H1N1 Influenza virus (pH1N1)—that contains bits of influenza viruses from birds, pigs, and humans. People with pandemic H1N1 Influenza virus experience many of the same symptoms as with regular seasonal influenza.

**Q. How severe is pandemic H1N1 influenza virus?**

A. The majority of cases of pandemic H1N1 influenza virus reported in Canada and the United States have been mild. Some of the cases have been more severe, generally involving healthy young people who rapidly progressed from mild illness to severe respiratory distress. Some illnesses have resulted in death. The Province of Ontario continues to monitor the severity of pandemic H1N1 influenza virus.

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**Q. What are the symptoms for pandemic H1N1 influenza virus?**

- A. The symptoms of pandemic H1N1 influenza virus are similar to other strains of the influenza virus. These symptoms include:
- acute onset of fever,
  - new or worsening cough, or
  - new or worsening shortness of breath.

Additional symptoms for pandemic H1N1 influenza virus may include:

- sore throat,
- joint pain,
- muscle pain,
- headache,
- exhaustion, weakness, or fatigue, or
- gastrointestinal symptoms (vomiting or diarrhea) in children under 5.

**Q. How is pandemic H1N1 influenza virus spread?**

- A. Pandemic H1N1 influenza virus is likely spread from person to person via the respiratory route, the same as seasonal influenza. Coughs and sneezes release the germs into the air where they can be breathed-in by other people. Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and door knobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system when a person touches their mouth or nose. influenza can be passed to others up to 24 hours before illness starts. It appears that pandemic H1N1 influenza virus can be spread for up to 7 days after illness starts. Children may spread the virus for longer periods.

**Q. What should people do if they think they might have pandemic H1N1 influenza virus?**

- A. If a person has mild influenza-like symptoms they should stay at home and take care of their symptoms. If symptoms worsen or are severe, a person should **call** their physician or go to their local hospital's emergency department. TeleHealth Ontario is also available at 1-866-797-0000.

**Q. How can I avoid getting pandemic H1N1 influenza virus?**

- A. You can decrease your risk of getting pandemic H1N1 influenza virus by being vigilant in taking regular measures to prevent the spread of any infectious disease:
1. Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or the inside of your elbow.
  2. Properly wash your hands as frequently as possible, for at least 15-seconds every time you wash them.
  3. Stay home when you are sick until the day after all of your symptoms are gone.
  4. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with your hands.

**Q. How long can pandemic H1N1 influenza virus live outside the body?**

- A. The virus can live outside the body on hard surfaces for hours but is easily killed by properly washing your hands with soap and water or cleaning your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. That's why proper hand hygiene is critical. Household disinfectants will kill the virus on household items and surfaces.

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**Q. Is there treatment for pandemic H1N1 influenza virus?**

A. Early results have shown that two antiviral medications, Tamiflu (oseltamivir) and Relenza (zanamavir), work to combat the pandemic H1N1 influenza virus. These drugs are currently only being used to treat severe pandemic H1N1 influenza virus cases or groups who are at high risk for complications. Treatment should be started within two days of symptom onset. Mild illness does not require treatment. Treatment of contacts (the people who come in contact with people who have pandemic H1N1 influenza virus) is not suggested at this time.

**Q. Is there a vaccine for pandemic H1N1 influenza virus?**

A. A vaccine for pandemic H1N1 influenza virus is currently being developed and should be available in late fall 2009. The Public Health Agency of Canada will provide the vaccine to everyone who wants it. When the vaccine for pandemic H1N1 influenza virus is available, KFL&A Public Health will be widely advertising how residents can get it.

**Q. What should I do if I have been in contact with someone who is a confirmed case of pandemic H1N1 influenza virus?**

A. There are no restrictions, requirements for quarantine, or any need to keep away from work, schools, or public places for individuals who have been in contact with a person who has pandemic H1N1 influenza virus. If someone becomes ill with signs and symptoms of pandemic H1N1 influenza virus, they should isolate themselves at home. If they require medical attention, be sure to call ahead to discuss their symptoms. If symptoms require them to go to a hospital or urgent care clinic, tell the hospital or clinic immediately that the person has influenza-like symptoms.

**Q. Should I travel to other countries affected by pandemic H1N1 influenza virus?**

A. The federal government, through the Public Health Agency of Canada and Foreign Affairs, is responsible for issuing travel advice to Canadians. Travel advisories can be found online at the Public Health Agency of Canada's website: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmppmv/pub-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmppmv/pub-eng.php). Although travel restrictions are unlikely to control this infection in population, people may wish to make individual decisions about the possibility of becoming ill when travelling.

**Q. Can I get pandemic H1N1 influenza virus from pigs?**

A. Influenza viruses can be transmitted among species. While the potential exists for people to become infected with this virus from pigs, it can only occur in close proximity—such as a swine production barn and slaughterhouse—and there are precautions that can be taken to minimize the likelihood of this transmission.

**Q. Can I get pandemic H1N1 influenza virus from eating pork?**

A. No. Properly cooking pork destroys the virus, if it was present in the pork to begin with.

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**Q. Where can I get specific information on pandemic H1N1 influenza virus and the outbreak?**

- A. For the latest information on pandemic H1N1 influenza virus, visit the links to public health and infectious disease agencies—the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and the World Health Organization—from the pandemic H1N1 influenza virus section on our website at [www.kflapublichealth.ca](http://www.kflapublichealth.ca).

KFL&A Public Health has created a section on our website specific for pandemic H1N1 influenza virus where information will be updated as frequently as it changes and becomes available from our provincial and federal counterparts. This section is on our website at [www.kflapublichealth.ca](http://www.kflapublichealth.ca).

There is much about this virus that we don't know, but we are closely monitoring outbreak activities across the world with other public health agencies.

**Q. What do the WHO pandemic phases mean?**

- A. pandemic phases are labels applied by the World Health Organization (WHO) to categorize the spread of new infectious disease in the world. The elevation from one phase to another isn't as a result of the severity of that infectious disease; just on the amount the disease has spread. In the WHO's scale, phases 1 to 3 have to do with being prepared for a pandemic—including capacity development and response planning activities. Phases 4 to 6 are a clear signal of need for response and efforts to lessen the impact of the new disease.

**Phase 1:** In nature, influenza viruses are always circulating in animals, especially birds. Even though these viruses might theoretically develop into pandemic viruses, Phase 1 means that no viruses circulating among animals have been reported to cause infections in humans.

**Phase 2:** In Phase 2 an animal influenza virus circulating among domesticated or wild animals is known to have caused infection in humans, and is therefore considered a potential pandemic threat.

**Phase 3:** In Phase 3, an animal or human-animal influenza virus has caused random cases or small clusters of disease in people, but has not resulted in human-to-human transmission in community-level outbreaks. Some human-to-human transmission may occur in some circumstances, such as when there is close contact between an infected person and an unprotected caregiver. But even this limited transmission under these restricted circumstances does not mean the virus has reached the level of being transmittable enough in humans to cause a pandemic.

**Phase 4:** In Phase 4, there is verified human-to-human transmission of an animal or human-animal influenza virus able to outbreaks in the community. These sustained community outbreaks are a significant upwards shift in the risk for a pandemic. Phase 4 means there is a significant increase in the risk of a pandemic but does not necessarily mean that a pandemic is going to happen.

**Phase 5:** In Phase 5, human-to-human spread of the virus is occurring in at least two countries in one WHO region.

**Phase 6:** In Phase 6, there are community level outbreaks in at least one other country in a different WHO region. A global pandemic is under way.

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