



SAFE WORK



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Pandemic Flu – H1N1 Virus

This bulletin provides the most current information about the H1N1 flu virus pandemic as it applies to **non-healthcare workplaces** in Manitoba.

What is pandemic flu?

The term pandemic flu refers to a world-wide spread of a new flu virus – the current virus of concern is the H1N1 virus. Because it is new, most people do not have immunity to it.

How is the virus transmitted?

The H1N1 virus is spread exactly like any other seasonal flu – person-to-person through close contact with droplets produced by coughing or sneezing. Although people are most infectious to others while they are sick with the flu, the virus can be spread about a day before symptoms begin and sometimes even if symptoms do not appear. This is why it is important for people to take precautions at all times.

The H1N1 flu outbreak is province-wide and it is likely that H1N1 is present in every community in Manitoba. H1N1 can possibly spread anywhere people gather – at home, in the community or at the workplace. Most non-healthcare workplaces do not put workers at a greater risk of getting the flu than any other places where people gather.

What can be done to help prevent the virus from spreading?

In Manitoba, there continues to be no public health reason to close schools, community centres or other public gathering places. The H1N1 virus is mostly spread through the mouth and nose. The following measures can help prevent spread of the virus:

- **Social distancing** – although there is no current need to avoid social gatherings, putting greater distance between yourself and fellow workers and avoiding close contact should decrease your risk of exposure.
- **Personal hygiene** – wash hands with soap & water frequently (or alcohol-based cleaners).
- **Cover your cough or sneeze** – cough into your sleeve or a tissue, not on your hands or in the air.
- **Stay home** – if you become sick with flu-like symptoms, you should stay home for the duration of the sickness (you may be contagious for up to 7 days).

The use of masks by well individuals in non-health care settings has not been shown to be effective in preventing people from getting the flu. For most workers, wearing a mask is not necessary or recommended. If you are ill, wearing a mask to cover your cough is a personal choice. Fellow workers who are not ill would not benefit from wearing a mask.

(See over)

Workplace Safety and Health Division Contact Information:

Winnipeg: (204) 945-3446
Toll-Free: 1-866-888-8186 (Manitoba only)
24-Hour Emergency Line: (204) 945-0581

Publications/resources available at: www.safemanitoba.com



What should non-healthcare workplaces do to prevent spread of flu?

- Provide adequate hand-washing facilities or ready access to other hand cleansers.
- Encourage proper cough etiquette.
- Provide for adequate workplace cleaning to keep handles, desks, etc. clean.
- Develop policies and practices that encourage workers who develop a flu-like illness to stay home.
- Provide working options that involve greater social distancing – online work, phone conferencing, etc.
- Review and update pandemic plans.

Precautions for interacting with clients who are experiencing influenza-like illness (ILI) symptoms

- If possible, clients experiencing symptoms of ILI should be advised to re-schedule their appointment, or encouraged to receive service by a method that does not involve face-to-face contact with an employee (ex. telephone or online service). If these clients are unable to re-schedule their appointments, the following precautions should be taken:
 - Workers should maintain a spatial separation from clients with ILI symptoms of ideally 2 metres but a minimum of 1 metre if face to face contact is taking place.
 - If the symptomatic, coughing individual is unable or unwilling to wear a mask and the spatial separation cannot be maintained as described above, then the worker should wear a mask.

For certain workplaces, such as correctional institutions, personal care homes, first responders, government (office or other service) work in non healthcare settings, etc., there may be situations that place workers at greater risk for exposure to the flu. Manitoba Health and Healthy Living has developed specific guidelines for such workplaces outlining procedures and practices to be followed, including the use of personal protective equipment. The links to these documents are available at www.gov.mb.ca/flu/index.html, as follows:

http://www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/flu/correctional_facilities.pdf

http://www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/flu/group_homes.pdf

http://www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/flu/residential.pdf

http://www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/flu/govt_workers_june30.pdf

http://www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/flu/transport.pdf

What about vaccination?

A vaccine for H1N1 is not available now, but might be available later this year.

What about antiviral medications such as Tamiflu?

These drugs are used mainly for the treatment of seriously ill people. Preventative use of these drugs by persons who are well is not recommended at this time.

Who should I contact for more information?

Manitoba Health and Healthy Living is the lead agency in the province for providing information about H1N1.

For further information about H1N1 flu, please visit the flu website at:

www.manitoba.ca

For a listing of local public health offices, please visit:

www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html

Reference to legal requirements under workplace safety and health legislation:

- General duties of employers: Workplace Safety and Health Act W210 part 4(1)

Additional workplace safety and health information available at www.safemanitoba.com