

May 1, 2009

Dear Fellow Nova Scotians:

I'd like to provide you with an update on the province's efforts in dealing with H1N1 (human swine influenza). You are receiving this update because we have identified you, or the people and organizations you serve, as a key stakeholder who will require information and updates as we move forward.

Public health professionals, in partnership with all district health authorities across Nova Scotia, continue to monitor and respond to H1N1 (human swine influenza). Nova Scotia has a strong public health system, with highly skilled and caring professionals, and I am confident in our ability to manage this issue.

Public Health offices across the province are getting many inquiries from workplaces, schools, universities, daycares, long-term care facilities, doctors, pharmacists, dentists, physiotherapist, travelers and many others. If you do not have symptoms, it is important to remember that daily activities should continue as normal. It is safe to go to school, work and socialize. Symptoms to watch for include fever and cough in combination with fatigue, headache and sore throat.

Fortunately, the confirmed cases of H1N1 (human swine influenza) in Nova Scotia to date have been mild, with no need for hospitalization. I fully expect the virus to spread, and when it does, we can expect to see more severe cases develop. We will continue to use our established public health practices and our network of health professionals to manage any additional cases of H1N1 (human swine influenza) in the province.

If you have influenza-like symptoms, and have recently traveled to an area affected by H1N1 (human swine influenza), like Mexico, or have been in contact with someone who has H1N1 (human swine influenza), it is important to avoid close contact with others for seven days after your symptoms start. This is the time when the illness can be spread to others. Stay home from work, school, public places and avoid social settings. Minimize contact with family members as much as possible. Like any illness, should your symptoms worsen, visit your doctor or a walk-in clinic and be sure to mention your travel history.

We do not recommend the use of masks by the general population, as they have not been proven effective in reducing the risk of infection. Furthermore, we do not recommend the use of anti-virals such as Tamiflu for treating mild illness or for prevention.

If you are experiencing influenza-like symptoms, but have not been exposed to H1N1 (human swine influenza), treat it as you would normal seasonal influenza. Stay home, rest and drink plenty of fluids. If it gets worse, again, see a doctor.

You should also be aware that the Public Health Agency of Canada has issued a travel advisory urging all travelers to postpone non-essential travel to Mexico until further notice. Those who will be traveling to an affected area, and have not received an influenza shot, are advised to get one.

This is an evolving situation and the information we are providing to you on H1N1 (human swine influenza) is likely to change. Media will receive updates, mid-afternoon on a daily basis. As well, I will share new information with you as it becomes available. I would ask you to please share this information with your staff, and your stakeholders, through your regular communication channels.

I have enclosed a fact sheet and questions and answers that might be helpful. You can also find updates and information about what we're doing to protect the health and safety of Nova Scotians at www.gov.ns.ca/hpp.

Remember, prevention continues to be the best approach to avoid illness. Nova Scotians are advised to wash their hands thoroughly and often, cough into their sleeves and stay away from the public if they are sick.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns, please send an email to healthpromotion@gov.ns.ca

Best regards,

Dr. Robert Strang
Chief Public Health Officer
Province of Nova Scotia

May 1, 2009

The following is information about H1N1 (human swine influenza) from the Department of Health Promotion and Protection. For more information, please visit www.gov.ns.ca/hpp.

Prevention

- If you do not have symptoms, it is important to remember that daily activities should continue as normal. It is safe to go to school, work and socialize.
- Prevention continues to be the best approach to avoid illness. Nova Scotians are advised to wash their hands thoroughly and often, cough into their sleeves and stay away from the public if they are sick.

Use of masks

- We do not recommend the use of surgical masks by the general population, as they have not been proven effective in reducing the risk of infection.

Use of anti-virals, such as Tamiflu

- Furthermore, we do not recommend the use of anti-virals such as Tamiflu for treating mild illness or for prevention.

Travel information

- If you have influenza-like symptoms, and have recently traveled to an area affected by H1N1 (human swine influenza), like Mexico, or have been in contact with someone who has H1N1 (human swine influenza), it is important to avoid close contact with others for seven days after your symptoms start as this is the time when the illness can be spread to others. Stay home from work, school, public places and avoid social settings. Minimize contact with family members as much as possible. Like any illness, should your symptoms worsen, visit your doctor or a walk-in clinic and be sure to mention your travel history.
- If you have traveled to Mexico or other affected areas more than seven days ago and are not feeling sick, go about your daily routine as usual. Any symptoms would have been apparent by now.
- If your travel partner was sick and you are now experiencing symptoms, stay at home, rest and drink plenty of fluids. Should your symptoms worsen, visit your doctor or a walk-in clinic.
- If someone you have come in contact with has traveled to Mexico or other affected areas and is sick, go about your daily routine as usual. If you begin to experience symptoms, follow the advice above.

Travel information continued

- If your staff, students or a co-worker has traveled to Mexico or other affected areas and are not experiencing any symptoms, they should continue to work, go to school and go about their daily routine as usual. If they begin to experience symptoms, they should follow the advice above.
- If you are going to travel to Mexico or other affected areas, please check for any travel advice issued by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). As of April 27 2009, PHAC is recommending travelers from Canada postpone elective or non-essential travel to Mexico until further notice. For more information visit, www.phac-aspc.gc.ca.
- If you have not traveled to Mexico or other affected areas but are feeling sick, treat it like a normal seasonal influenza. Remember this is still our normal influenza season.

The above is information about H1N1 (human swine influenza) from the Department of Health Promotion and Protection. For more information, please visit www.gov.ns.ca/hpp or call 1-888-451-4222.

H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Flu): Fact Sheet for Nova Scotians April 29, 2009 1500

What is swine influenza?

Swine influenza (sometimes called swine flu) is a respiratory illness of pigs caused by type A influenza that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza among pigs. Swine influenza viruses do not normally infect humans. However, human infections with swine influenza do occur, and cases of human-to-human spread of swine influenza viruses have been documented.

Human swine influenza is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to those of the regular human seasonal influenza.

What are the symptoms of human swine influenza?

The symptoms of human swine influenza include:

- Cough
- Fever
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Sore throat
- Body aches/headache
- Eye pain
- Lack of appetite
- Vomiting and diarrhea (in children under 5 years of age)

How is the human swine influenza virus spread?

At this time the virus is contagious to humans, however, it is not known how easily the virus spreads between people.

Coughs and sneezes release the germs into the air where they can be breathed in by others.

Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transferred to the lungs when someone touches their mouth and/or nose.

What is the treatment?

Because human swine influenza is caused by a virus, antibiotics are not effective. Antiviral medications can sometimes help lessen influenza symptoms, but require a prescription.

Who will be treated?

Treatment (if any) will vary depending upon the situation. Public Health will discuss treatment with the physician on a case by case basis.

What should I do if I have been diagnosed with human swine influenza?

You should stay home from work, school, public places and other social settings. Avoid close contact with others for seven days after your symptoms started. This is the time when the illness can be spread to others. If your symptoms worsen, see your healthcare provider.

How can I prevent spreading or picking up human swine influenza?

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water, or use hand sanitizer.
- Cough and sneeze in your arm or sleeve.
- Keep doing what you normally do, but stay home when you are sick.
- Do not share drinking glasses or eating utensils.
- Get your annual influenza vaccine

Can you get human swine influenza from eating pork?

No. Proper cooking of pork products would kill influenza viruses. Make sure pork is cooked through, not pink in the middle. Use a food thermometer to confirm pork has been heated through to 71 degrees Celsius (160 degrees Fahrenheit).

Should I wear a mask?

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) does not recommend the public wear surgical masks to protect against human swine influenza. Evidence shows these are not effective in preventing spread of influenza in the public. People often wear masks incorrectly, or contaminate them when putting them on and taking them off, which could increase the risk of illness.

If I've been to the areas where there are cases of human swine influenza or I've been in contact with someone who has human swine influenza, and I'm feeling sick, what should I do?

Isolate yourself (keep away from others), and see your health care professional to discuss your symptoms. Make sure to tell your health care professional about your travel history.

What does isolation mean?

Isolation means keeping sick people away from healthy people and limiting their activity to stop the spread of an illness. When isolated, you should stay away from others in your home; (ie. in a separate room in your house), and if you are in a room with others, a surgical mask should be worn.

If I have travel plans to areas where there are cases of human swine influenza, what should I do?

As of April 27, 2009, PHAC is recommending Canadians postpone elective or non-essential travel to Mexico until further notice. This information can be found at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca If you are traveling to affected areas, you should do the same things you would normally do to protect yourself and others during normal influenza season. Wash your hands, cover coughs and sneezes, stay in if you are sick, and get a yearly influenza immunization.

Public Health in Nova Scotia is encouraging all travelers going to Mexico (who have not received the influenza vaccine this influenza season; November 2008- present) to be vaccinated. Even though the yearly influenza vaccine may not protect against the human swine influenza, there is still seasonal influenza in Mexico and the vaccine will help protect you from getting seasonal human influenza.

Is this the next influenza pandemic?

Pandemic influenza is defined as a new influenza virus that spreads easily between humans. The H1N1 human swine influenza that has been identified appears to be a new virus, and there is some evidence of human-to-human transmission.

However, more investigation and information is needed to determine the severity of the disease and the ease with which it can spread. These investigations are ongoing.