

Fact Sheet

September 2009

H1N1 Flu Virus Information for Post-Secondary Students

What is H1N1 flu virus?

H1N1 flu virus is a respiratory illness that causes fever, chills, cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, and possibly nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea just like seasonal flu (influenza).

How does the virus spread?

Influenza is transmitted from person to person. Coughs and sneezes release the flu virus into the air where it can be breathed in directly by others within six feet. The virus can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs where it can be picked up on hands and transmitted when a person touches their mouth or nose.

How long can someone with the flu infect someone else?

People with the flu may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 or more days after becoming sick. You are most infectious at the start of symptoms. It is best to stay home until your fever is gone and you are feeling well.

How can I stop the transmission of the flu?

Washing your hands is the single best way of preventing the spread of the flu.

Take these steps to help stop the flu:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water for 15 to 20 seconds or clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue and wash or sanitize your hands afterwards
- If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve or arm - NOT your hands
- Don't share objects that might transmit flu such as utensils and drinking cups, musical instrument mouthpieces, water bottles, telephones, etc.
- Watch for flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches and possibly vomiting or diarrhea and stay home if these appear
- Stay in your room if you are feeling ill
- Stay well rested, be physically active, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious food

When should I wash my hands?

- After coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose
- After using the bathroom
- After shaking hands
- Before and after eating and/or preparing food
- When you come into contact with someone who is sick
- Before and after using shared equipment such as computers, washrooms, or gym facilities

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My room-mate is ill with the flu. What should I do?

Influenza viruses are circulating in the community so hand hygiene is particularly important. If you are feeling well, you should continue to go to school and participate in regular activities. Minimize contact with your ill room-mate. Make sure you wash your hands after any contact with shared facilities.

I have flu-like symptoms, what should I do?

If you become ill with flu-like symptoms stay home (in your room as much as possible) until your symptoms are gone. Minimize contact with other people. If you become ill while in class, leave as soon as possible and go home.

When should I seek medical care?

Call your health care provider or Telehealth Ontario if you experience flu-like symptoms and:

- are pregnant
- have heart or lung disease
- have chronic health problems that require regular medical attention
- have an illness that affects your immune system, such as diabetes, cancer or HIV/AIDS
- your symptoms are worsening

What can I do to ease my symptoms?

- Increase the amount of fluids you drink (water, flat ginger ale, diluted apple juice, broth, sports drinks)
- Get plenty of rest (symptoms may last longer if you don't rest)
- Over-the-counter medications to treat a fever will usually help make you feel better, but they will not lessen how infectious you are
- Always follow manufacturers instructions for over-the-counter medications

(For more information, see our fact sheet on Self-Care)

How do I keep surfaces clean to prevent the spread of influenza?

Common household disinfectants will kill the virus on household items and surfaces. Make sure you clean your shared facilities and equipment regularly.

Will the annual flu shot protect me?

The regular seasonal flu shot will protect you against seasonal flu (check our website for information on upcoming flu shot clinics). This year's seasonal flu shot will not protect you against H1N1 flu virus. More information about the H1N1 flu shot will be available later in the fall.

Where can I get more information?

- Toronto Public Health toronto.ca/health or 416-338-7600
- Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care health.gov.on.ca
- TeleHealth Ontario 1-866-797-0000.
- Public Health Agency of Canada phac-aspc.gc.ca or 1-800-454-8302
- Fight flu fightflu.ca