

H1N1 Flu Virus Ontario Ministry of Health & Long Term Care

Every year as winter approaches, we begin hearing about the flu. This year we're hearing about a different flu season. That's because in addition to the regular or seasonal flu, we have to protect ourselves against the H1N1 flu virus that has been such a big story worldwide in 2009.

This H1N1 flu virus was first detected in Mexico last spring. Within just a few months, it spread to many countries around the world, prompting the World Health Organization in June to declare the first global flu pandemic in 41 years. The H1N1 flu virus has affected many Ontarians to date, and this coming flu season it is expected to affect many more. So we need to be ready.

Influenza Prevention and Care

Flu shots – seasonal and H1N1

This year, two vaccines have been developed – one against seasonal flu and the other against H1N1 flu. Remember, you might need them both. The seasonal flu shot will not protect you against the H1N1 flu. This year's seasonal flu shot will be available as usual in the fall, while the H1N1 vaccine will be available later in the year. The H1N1 vaccine will first be offered to target groups such as health care workers, pregnant women and people with pre-existing medical conditions. Everyone who needs and wants the H1N1 flu shot, as well as the seasonal flu shot, will be able to get one. Consult your health care provider or public health unit about this year's flu immunization programs.

Cleaning your hands is the best defence against the flu

We've all heard this before, but it can never be said too often: proper hand cleaning is an important way to guard against the flu and limit the spread of the flu virus. Flu viruses can live on your hands for up to five minutes and they can live on hard surfaces that you touch with your hands – like countertops and telephones – for up to two days. So clean your hands often to protect yourself and others from getting the flu.



Hand washing: Soap and water work well, but be sure to use lots of soap and water. Wash your hands thoroughly for about 15 seconds. Try humming a favourite tune and keep washing until the song is over to make sure you wash your hands long enough.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizer: Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are as good as soap and water to clean your hands, unless they are visibly dirty. Make sure you really rub the sanitizer all over your hands, and be sure to use a sanitizer that contains 60 – 90% alcohol base. Keep alcohol-based hand sanitizer handy at home, at work, at school, and in the car.

Preventing the spread of the flu

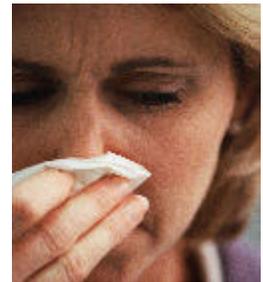
	Good hand hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of all flu viruses. Wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly and often.
	Keep an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (gel or wipes) handy at work, home and in your car. It needs to be at least 60% alcohol to be effective.
	Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and dispose of tissue. Cough into your upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue.
	Avoid large crowds of people where viruses can spread easily. Stay home when you are sick.
	Keep common surfaces and items clean and disinfected.

What to do if you have symptoms

It is very important to remember that H1N1 is just another strain of influenza. But like any flu, it can be serious and must not be taken lightly.

Symptoms

Both seasonal and H1N1 flu have the same symptoms. Those can include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue.



When you should seek medical care

Most cases of the flu, whether seasonal or H1N1, tend to be mild. However, if you do not start to feel better after a few days or if your symptoms get worse, you should either contact your doctor or call Telehealth Ontario.

You should seek medical care immediately if you experience flu symptoms and you:

- are pregnant;
- have heart or lung disease;
- have any other chronic health problem that requires regular medical attention;
- are elderly or frail; or
- have an illness or are receiving treatments – for example, for diabetes, cancer, or HIV/AIDS – that might affect your immune system.

If your child is suffering from the flu, you should seek medical care immediately if his or her symptoms improve and then suddenly become worse. In addition, seek care if you notice any of the following signs in your child:

- fast or difficult breathing;
- bluish or dark-coloured lips or skin;
- drowsiness to the point where he or she cannot be easily wakened;
- severe crankiness or not wanting to be held; or
- dehydration – not drinking enough fluids and not going to the bathroom regularly.

How to care for yourself

If you do get the flu, there are some things you can do to make yourself feel better and avoid spreading the virus to others. Stay home and get plenty of rest if you're sick. Clean your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, particularly after coughing or blowing your nose. Also, remember to cough or sneeze into your sleeve if you don't have a tissue available.

To ease the symptoms of the flu:

- drink lots of fluids;
- avoid drinks with caffeine;
- take basic pain or fever relievers;
- do not give acetylsalicylic acid (ASA or Aspirin®) to children or teenagers under the age of 16;
- apply heat for short periods of time using a hot water bottle or heating pad to reduce muscle pain;
- take a warm bath;
- gargle with a glass of warm water or suck on hard candy or lozenges;
- use saline drops or spray for a stuffy nose; and
- avoid alcohol and tobacco.

For information about seasonal flu, H1N1 and pandemic preparedness call **ServiceOntario**, Infoline at 1-866-532-3161 (Toll-free in Ontario only)
TTY 1-800-387-5559. In Toronto, TTY 416-327-4282
Hours of operation : 8:30am - 5:00pm

Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000
TTY: 1-866-797-0007
Hours of operation : 24 hours, 7 days a week

To find health care options in your community, visit ontario.ca/healthcareoptions
or call 1-866-330-6206

If you don't have a health care provider, you can register for the **Health Care Connect** program at ontario.ca/healthcareconnect or call: 1-800-445-1822