

Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Questions and Answers (Q & A) for Parents of School-Aged & Preschool Children

Updated - September 25, 2009

1. What is Pandemic (H1N1) 2009?

Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 is a new strain of the influenza A virus which the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared as a pandemic virus, spreading person to person in many countries around the world. It contains a combination of genes from pigs (swine), birds (avian) and human influenza viruses.

2. Is this the same as seasonal influenza?

No. Strains of seasonal influenza circulate every year. This strain is not the same as previous or current seasonal strains of human influenza virus.

3. How is this virus spread?

The Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza virus is a respiratory virus. It spreads the same way as seasonal viruses, from one person to another when an infected person coughs or sneezes, releasing the virus in to the air where it can then be breathed in by others. These viruses can also remain on hard surfaces like counters, taps and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and spread when someone touches their eyes, mouth and/or nose.

4. How will I know if my child is ill with Pandemic (H1N1) 2009?

The pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza virus as well as the seasonal influenza virus cause an influenza-like-illness (ILI). See the description below.

5. What is influenza-like-illness (ILI)?

Influenza-like-illness (ILI) can produce a sudden onset of respiratory symptoms with a new cough and fever (which may or may not be present), and one or more of the following: sore throat, joint pain, muscle aches, weakness, and some may have diarrhea, nausea and/or vomiting.

6. How long is a person contagious if they develop pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza?

Usually persons are contagious from one day before, up to seven days after symptoms

begin. Children, especially younger children, immunocompromised individuals and those with severe illness may be contagious for a longer period, up to 10 days.

6. Will my child become really sick?

Most people have had fairly mild illness. A few people have progressed to a more severe respiratory illness. Most people recover from influenza in about a week.

7. What should my child do if they have symptoms of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Influenza?

If your child has mild ILI and has been previously healthy, stay at home and rest and avoid close contact with others as much as possible. This is to keep them from infecting others and spreading the virus further.

8. What should I tell the school/child care centre if my child is ill?

Inform the school/child care centre if your child will not be attending. Parents may be asked to provide information about the reason for their child's absence such as an illness, injury or a medical/dental appointment. Information about illness will help Alberta Health Services to track types of illness in schools.

9. If my child has ILI, how long should my child stay at home?

Students should remain home from school or child care until they are symptom free and feeling well, and are able to fully participate in all normal day-to-day activities.

10. What do I do if my child's symptoms become worse?

If your child's symptoms are getting worse, such as increasing shortness of breath or chest pain, or if they are not recovering, call Health Link Alberta 1-866-408-LINK (5465) for advice or call your doctor. If their symptoms become severe, go to an emergency centre right away. Inform the health care staff of your child's symptoms especially if they are coughing or sneezing.

11. Is there any treatment for Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Influenza virus?

Early treatment with antiviral medication may be advised for individuals at risk of complications.

12. Can my child and I be immunized for influenza?

Immunization is the best defense against becoming ill with influenza and it helps to prevent the spread of the virus to others. Alberta Health Services will offer seasonal influenza vaccine starting in October 2009 and Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 vaccine starting in November/December 2009 (based on availability of the vaccine) to all Albertans at various locations across the province. Dates and location details will be announced.

13. What else can I do to protect my child and family from becoming infected with Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Influenza virus?

- (a) Hand hygiene is an important and effective way to prevent the spread of germs. Hands should be cleaned before preparing or eating food, touching one's face and after coughing or sneezing, using the toilet and after handling soiled materials.
- Wash hands with soap and warm water is one of the most effective ways to stop the spread of infection. Hand washing with soap and water must be done when hands are visibly soiled. The mechanical action of rubbing soapy hands under warm running water for a minimum of 15 seconds and then patting the hands dry with either a clean towel or paper towel is effective in removing bacteria from the skin.
 - Alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) may be used when soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly soiled. Hands must be dry before the application. Apply enough ABHR to spread the product over all the surfaces of the hands, concentrating on finger tips, backs of hands and the base of the thumb. Continue to rub the hands until all the product is dry, which should be a minimum of 15-20 seconds.
- (b) Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue and discard in to a waste basket or cover them with your arm, not your hand.
- (c) Carry out frequent household cleaning using regular household cleaners, focusing particularly on the high touch areas such as bathroom and kitchen sinks and taps, doorknobs, telephones and keyboards.
- (d) Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- (e) Monitor how your child is feeling and stay home if ill.

14. Where can I learn more?

Health Link Alberta 1-866-408-LINK (5465)

Alberta Health Services www.albertahealthservices.ca

Alberta Health and Wellness www.health.alberta.ca

Alberta Education www.education.alberta.ca

Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) www.phac-aspc.gc.ca