



HEALTH & FAMILY SERVICES CHATHAM-KENT PUBLIC HEALTH UNIT

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pH1N1 Influenza Virus (Pandemic Influenza) Q & A for Families with School Aged Children

What is pH1N1 flu virus (Pandemic Influenza)?

This virus which was previously called "swine flu" is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to those of the regular human seasonal flu. The symptoms may include fever, fatigue, lack of appetite, coughing and sore throat. Some people with this virus have also reported vomiting and diarrhea.

Is this virus contagious? How does it spread between people?

The virus is believed to be spread in the same manner as seasonal influenza: person to person mainly by "droplet spread." This happens when droplets from a cough or sneeze are released into the air and then are breathed in by others who are less than six (6) feet away. The virus can also be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands. The virus can live outside the body on hard surfaces for up to 48 hours. However it should be noted that the virus is easily killed by hand washing with warm water and soap, or by using a 60%-90% alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Household disinfectants will kill the virus on household items and surfaces.

Will the school be closed if there is a case of pH1N1 influenza?

Public health officials will consider each situation, but at this time school closures will not occur for this virus, just as schools would not close for seasonal influenza. It is not felt that this measure is necessary at this time.

Should my child stay home?

Children who are healthy are expected to go to school. There is no reason to withdraw children.

What are you doing to protect my child?

A person diagnosed with this virus will be away from school for seven (7) days following illness onset, or until they feel well. This will prevent transmission of the virus to other students.

CKPHU recommends that staff and students take these steps to prevent themselves and others from becoming ill:

- Wash your hands often for at least 15 seconds with soap and water or use hand sanitizer containing 60-90% alcohol;
- Sneeze and cough into your upper sleeve or use a tissue. Discard used tissue into the garbage immediately after use;
- Stay at home if you are ill;
- See your health care provider if you or your child are experiencing severe influenza-like symptoms.

Hands should be washed:

- after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose
- after using the bathroom
- after shaking hands
- before eating and/or preparing food
- before touching your face
- when you or someone you come into contact with is sick

Schools should follow usual practises which include:

- Send children with symptoms of illness home and advise them to stay home until they are well;
- Remind students daily of the importance of regular, thorough hand washing and good personal hygiene; and
- Encourage students to avoid sharing of food, beverages and other personal items.

Working together to build a healthy community.

Should children, returning from travel to Mexico or other areas affected by pH1N1 flu virus be asked to remain at home?

If students are well, then they should continue to go to school. As usual, if students exhibit symptoms of illness, parents are called and advised to have students stay home until they are well. They are also advised to contact their health care providers at that time.

I think my child has been in contact with someone who was ill with this virus. What do I do?

If your child is feeling well, he or she can go back to school and continue regular activities. There is no need to be under "quarantine".

Should students wear masks at school?

There is no health reason for wearing masks. We are concerned about the fear and panic that may result from the wearing of masks, especially among young children. Parents who feel strongly about wanting their children to wear masks should discuss this with their school administrator. The Public Health Agency of Canada does not recommend that members of the general public wear masks to protect against contracting the H1N1 flu virus. Evidence shows that this is not an effective public health measure.

What measures are caretakers taking to disinfect schools?

Caretakers will continue to provide thorough and effective cleaning and disinfecting of schools as part of their routine duties. No enhanced cleaning or disinfecting is currently recommended.

Are drinking fountains being turned off?

No. Regular practices and precautions should be followed. Avoid touching the spout of drinking fountains.

Are breakfast programs, hot lunch programs and other activities involving food being cancelled?

Breakfast programs and hot lunch programs can continue as usual.

Will clubs and extra-curricular activities be cancelled?

Extra-curricular activities will continue at this time.

Where can I obtain further information?

Chatham-Kent Public Health Unit

www.chatham-kent.ca

519-352-7270

Telehealth Ontario

1-866-797-0000

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

www.health.gov.on.ca

Public Inquiry line

1-800-476-9708

Public Health Agency of Canada

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca

1-800-4548302

The World Health Organization

www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/i/index.html