

## PANDEMIC (H1N1) 2009 Q & A FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN ATTENDING CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

### 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 through droplets that are released through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The droplets can then be breathed in by others. These viruses can also remain on hard surfaces like counters, taps and door handles, where they can be picked up on hands. A person then becomes infected by touching 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 description below.

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

ILI is defined as the sudden onset of fever and cough, and with one or more of the following:

- sore throat;
- joint pain;
- muscle pain;
- extreme fatigue;
- in children under 5, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may also be present; and
- in persons under 5 or over 65, fever may not be prominent.

**If your child is ill with influenza-like illness and their symptoms are not improving, contact Health LINK Alberta:**

**Toll free: 1-866-408-5465, Edmonton: 780-408-5465, Calgary: 403-943-5465**

**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.

**7. Will my child become really ill?**

Most people have had mild illness and start to feel better after three to four days by resting, drinking plenty of fluids, eating nutritious foods and using over the counter medications as necessary to treat influenza-like symptoms. A few people have progressed to a more severe respiratory illness. Most people recover from influenza in about a week.

**8. What should I do if my child has symptoms of Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza?**

If your child has mild influenza-like illness and has been previously healthy, they should 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.

**9. What should I tell the child care centre if my child is ill?**

Inform the child care centre if your child will not be in attendance. Parents should 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 illnesses in child care programs.

Parents should talk to program staff about what their policies are related to the care of ill children and what information they require from parents.

**10. If my child has influenza-like illness, how long should my child stay at home?**

Children should remain home from child care programs until they no longer have symptoms and they are feeling well enough to fully participate in all normal day-to-day activities. A dry cough may continue to persist after they have returned to day care.

**11. 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 (Toll free: 1-866-408-LINK (5465), Edmonton: 780-408-5465, Calgary: 403-943-5465) for advice or call your doctor to book an appointment. 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.

**12. Is there any treatment for Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza virus?**

Early treatment with antiviral medication may be advised for individuals, including children with severe illness or those at risk of complications.

**13. 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. The Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 vaccine and the seasonal influenza vaccine are available to all Albertans over the age of six months at various locations across the province. Consult the Alberta Health Services website for more information.

**14. 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 after coughing or sneezing, before preparing or eating food, touching one's face, and after using the toilet and handling soiled materials.
- Cleaning hands with plain soap and water is one of the most effective ways to stop the spread of infection. Hand cleaning 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 germs from the skin. However, if soap and water are not available use a towelette that contains detergent, then use an alcohol-based hand rub containing at least 60 per cent alcohol.
  - Alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) containing at least 60 per cent alcohol 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. Cover your coughs and sneezes with your arm, not your hand. If you cough or sneeze into a tissue, immediately discard the tissue into a waste basket and clean your hands.
- (b) Carry out frequent household cleaning using regular household cleaners, focusing particularly on the high touch areas such as bathroom and kitchen sinks and taps, door handles, telephones and keyboards.
- (c) Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- (d) Monitor how your child is feeling and if they are ill, they should not attend the child care centre.

**15. Where can I learn more?**

Health Link Alberta Toll free: 1-866-408-LINK (5465), Edmonton: 780-408-5465,  
Calgary: 403-943-5465

Alberta Health Services [www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca)

Alberta Health and Wellness [www.health.alberta.ca](http://www.health.alberta.ca)

Alberta Children and Youth Services [www.child.alberta.ca](http://www.child.alberta.ca)

Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca)