

H1N1 Fact Sheet

Updated: October 5, 2009

Home Management of H1N1 and other Influenza-like Illnesses (ILI)

Seasonal influenza and H1N1 are acute viral illnesses of the respiratory tract. There are various strains of influenza; H1N1 is a new type.

Symptoms of H1N1: Fever and/or cough with one or more of sore throat, head ache, muscle aches, joint aches, unusual tiredness, vomiting and diarrhea in children less than five years of age. If someone you know becomes sick, there are ways to care for them and reduce the risk of someone else, including you, getting sick.

Here are 10 ways to help an ill person, while protecting yourself and others:

- 1. Minimize contact with the ill person.** Provide care and comfort for the sick person, but do not stay with them at all times, ensuring you supervise children who are sick. Be sure to practice good basic hygiene, such as washing your hands immediately after being in contact with the sick person or things they have touched.
- 2. Sick people should stay in their own room, so they do not spread the virus elsewhere in the house.** Encourage them to rest. Restrict visitors unless necessary; use telephone, e-mail or letters instead. The sick person should not go out in public or return to daycare, school or work until they are feeling well and able to resume normal day-to-day activities.
- 3. The sick person should use good cough hygiene.** This means the sick person should cough and sneeze into a sleeve or tissue when someone is in the room to help stop the spread of infection.
- 4. Clean your hands regularly with soap and water or alcohol-based hand gel—even if they are not visibly dirty:**
 - Before and after being close to someone who is sick;
 - After being in a sick person's room and/or touching anything that a sick person has touched (such as dishes, towels, clothes or removing trash);
 - Before you prepare and eat food; and,
 - Before touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- 5. Keep the sick person's things separate from others.** Provide the sick person with their own towel, face cloth and toothbrush. Wash dishes, dirty laundry and towels with hot water and soap, as soon as removing them from the room. Keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom and toys for children) clean by using a household cleaner. Linens, eating utensils and dishes belonging to those who are sick do not need to be cleaned separately, but they should not be shared before being washed. Wash linens (such as bed sheets and towels) with household laundry soap and dry on a hot setting. Clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub immediately after handling dirty laundry.

6. **Anything a sick person touches should be handled carefully.** Line garbage cans with a plastic bag or use a garbage bin with a foot pedal, minimizing contact with the contents. Disinfect commonly used surfaces such as door knobs, taps and light switches by cleaning them with a household cleaner or a mixture that is 1 part bleach and 10 parts water.
7. **Give the sick person fluids and nutritious foods.** Offer warm drinks, such as tea with honey and lemon, or chicken soup, which can be very soothing for those with sore throats. They may not be hungry at first, but simple foods such as cooked oatmeal, mashed vegetables, bananas, rice, apples or toast may be welcomed.
8. **Ensure no one smokes near the sick person.** Smoking, as well as exposure to second hand smoke, should be avoided, as it is harmful and especially hard on the lungs when there is an infection.
9. **Treat the fever and cough.** Fever often comes with chills or aches and pains. Acetaminophen or ibuprofen may help bring down the fever and take away the aches. Do not give aspirin to children as it has been linked to Reye's syndrome. A cool face cloth to the face and neck or body can help the fever. Avoid overuse of cough suppressants. When taking medication, be sure to follow the instructions on the label.
10. **Be on alert for complications.** Most people will begin to feel better after a few days. Sometimes complications, such as pneumonia, can occur and may require an assessment by a health practitioner. Asthma, diabetes and heart disease can also worsen. Watch for the warning signs:
 - Starts to feel better, then fever returns and illness worsens;
 - Wheezing, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing;
 - Blood in the phlegm;
 - Chest pain;
 - Hard to wake up, unusually quiet or unresponsive;
 - Hallucinations; and
 - New onset of diarrhea, vomiting or abdominal pain.

If any of these signs occur, call a health care provider and get advice about what to do.

If you or the person you are caring for is pregnant (or up to four weeks post-partum), please contact a health practitioner for advice.

If you are pregnant and caring for a person sick with flu-like symptoms, it is recommended that someone else care for the ill person. If this is not possible, please be extra careful about these prevention steps and seek medical care if you develop flu-like symptoms.

Remember, in most situations, the cases we have seen in Nova Scotia have been typical flu-like illness, which patients can treat at home. However, more people with severe illness are expected. Wash your hands frequently, cough or sneeze into your sleeve. If you are ill, stay home, avoid close contact with others until you are feeling well and able to resume normal day-to-day activities, and follow the advice given to you.

For further information and advice on H1N1, call HealthLink 811 to talk to a registered nurse.

Help play a part in managing influenza-like illness in Nova Scotia!

