

The Huron County Health Unit and Perth District Health Unit are working closely with the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Public Health Agency of Canada to monitor the current outbreak of the H1N1 flu virus.

## What is the H1N1 flu virus?

The H1N1 flu virus is a new strain of influenza. The information we have on the virus is changing as scientists learn more about it. We do know that this virus is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to those of 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.

## How is the H1N1 flu virus spread?

Influenza spreads person-to-person via the respiratory route. Coughs and sneezes release the germs into the air where they can be directly breathed in by others. Otherwise, germs can rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can survive for up to 48 hours and be picked up on hands.

General infection control practices, such as washing hands, coughing or sneezing into your arm, and staying home when ill, can help to reduce the spread of most viruses, including flu.

## How severe is the new H1N1 flu virus?

Here in Ontario, the virus continues to resemble seasonal influenza with mild symptoms in the majority of cases. Most people recover from the illness without the need for hospitalization or medical care. Health officials are monitoring the situation closely in case there are changes in severity of illness.

## What kind of flu season can we expect this fall?

This year is a different flu season. In the fall and winter, there will be two types of flu viruses circulating – seasonal flu viruses and the new H1N1 flu virus.

## Is there a vaccine to protect against the H1N1 flu virus?

Yes, there are two different flu vaccines available this flu season, one for the H1N1 flu virus and one for seasonal flu. The flu shots will be available in the following phases:

1. Seasonal flu vaccine for those 65 years of age and older and residents of Long-Term Care Homes.
2. H1N1 vaccine for priority groups (persons with chronic conditions under the age of 65, pregnant women, children six months to less than 5 years of age, persons residing in remote and isolated settings or communities, healthcare workers, and household contacts and care providers of infants less than 6 months and persons who are immunocompromised) followed by the H1N1 vaccine for all other groups.

## How can I avoid getting the H1N1 flu virus?

The following precautions reduce the spread of all viruses, including the H1N1 flu virus.

- Wash your hands well and often. If your hands are not visibly dirty, you can use a hand sanitizer.
- Cough and sneeze into your upper sleeve or arm rather than your hands.
- If you are ill, stay home until the fever has been absent for 24 hours and you feel well enough to resume normal activities.
- Avoid touching your face as much as possible.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces often, such as doorknobs and counters, especially if someone in the home or workplace is sick.
- Avoid close physical contact with sick people.
- It is not necessary to wear a mask in public places, such as workplaces.
- Consult with your Health Unit about when and where to get your flu shots.

3. Seasonal flu vaccine for all other age groups (less than 65 years of age) and anyone 65 years of age and older or living in a Long-Term Care Home who did not receive the seasonal influenza vaccine during the first phase.

The H1N1 vaccine will protect only against the H1N1 flu virus. For best protection, it is recommended that you get both the H1N1 flu shot and the seasonal flu shot.

**I think I may have been in contact with someone who was ill with this flu virus. What do I do?**

If you are feeling well, you can continue to attend work or school and other regular activities. There is no need to put yourself under “quarantine”. If you do become ill, stay home until the fever has been absent for 24 hours and you feel well enough to resume normal activities. It is not unusual for individuals to experience a cough for days to weeks after a respiratory infection, so a cough in the absence of other symptoms is not sufficient to keep someone away from work or school. If the patient is a healthcare provider, they should remain off work until 24 hours after all symptoms other than a mild cough have resolved, typically a period of five to eight days. However, healthcare providers who have been treated with oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) for 72 hours will not be as infectious and may return to work if they feel generally well except for a mild cough. Staff should consult with Occupational Health (if available) for a return to work assessment.

**Are there any medications that prevent or treat this flu?**

Antiviral medications may be recommended by a health care provider for treatment of certain persons diagnosed with this virus. Antiviral medications are not recommended for people who do not have any symptoms of illness. Antibiotics are not effective against flu.

**What is the difference between the flu and a cold?**

How do you know if you have a cold or the flu? Here are symptoms of the two illnesses:		
SYMPTOM	COLD	FLU
Fever	Rare	Usually high, sudden onset; lasts 3 - 4 days
Headache	Rare	Frequent
Aches & Pains	Slight	Usual, often quite severe
Weakness	Rare / Mild	Moderate to extreme. Can last up to one month
Bedridden	Rarely	Frequently
Sniffles	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Usual	Sometimes
Sore Throat	Common	Sometimes
Cough	Sometimes Mild to Moderate	Usual can become severe
Complications	Sinus or Ear Infection	Pneumonia, kidney failure, heart failure, can be life threatening

**Where can I get more information?**

**Perth County**

Call Health Line at 519-271-7600 ext 267. Monday to Friday, 8:30am – 4:30pm. [www.pdhu.on.ca](http://www.pdhu.on.ca)

**Huron County**

Call 519-482-3416. Monday to Friday, 8:30am – 4:30pm. [www.huroncounty.ca/health](http://www.huroncounty.ca/health)

**Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care**

Telehealth: General health advice from a Registered Nurse. Call 1-866-797-0000.

TTY : 1-866-797-0007. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [www.health.gov.on.ca](http://www.health.gov.on.ca)

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