
INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Health Services
Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport

H1N1 FLU VIRUS (HUMAN SWINE FLU) UNDER SURVEILLANCE

Update: 12 p.m. PDT, June 29, 2009

VICTORIA – British Columbia continues to monitor and respond to the recent spread of the novel H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu). Six new cases have been confirmed since June 26 – four in Fraser Health, one in Vancouver Coastal Health and one in Interior Health – for a total of 270 cases in the province, the vast majority of which have been mild cases with patients either recovered or currently recovering.

How many cases of the H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu) are there in B.C.?

- BC Centre for Disease Control has confirmed 270 individuals in British Columbia so far have tested positive for the H1N1 flu virus that has caused illness in the U.S., Mexico and many other countries. Specimens are also tested at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg.
- British Columbia's confirmed cases include:
 - One hundred and twenty-six in Fraser Health.
 - Seven in Interior Health.
 - Thirty-one in Northern Health.
 - Seventy-six in Vancouver Coastal Health.
 - Thirty on Vancouver Island.
- Six lab-confirmed cases in B.C. have been admitted to hospital. One lab-confirmed case in B.C. has been admitted to the ICU.
- Clinicians and public health partners across the province have increased vigilance and will continue to report unusual clusters or cases of severe respiratory illnesses.

Current status of outbreak

- On June 11, the World Health Organization (WHO) raised its alert level to phase 6 (the pandemic phase). The WHO considers the overall severity of the pandemic to be “moderate”, which means that most people recover from infection without the need for hospitalization or medical care.
- The WHO reports that the situation is evolving with more cases expected in the coming weeks and months.
- The most current Canadian numbers of confirmed cases are available at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine-porcine/surveillance-eng.php>.
- The most current U.S. numbers of confirmed cases are available at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/index.htm>.

- The most current international numbers of confirmed cases are available at <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/updates/en/index.html>.

How can I stop the spread of the H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu)?

- Experts have determined that the H1N1 flu virus can spread relatively easily from person to person.
- **Stay home** from work or school if you are sick, regardless of where you have travelled, unless directed to seek medical care. Limit contact with others.
- Call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 if you have symptoms or concerns to speak to a nurse anytime of the day or night.
- See a health care provider if your symptoms become worse but call ahead to let them know you have fever or cough illness.
- Exercise commonsense precautionary measures:
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. When you cough, do so into your sleeve if possible.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze.

What is H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu)?

- Swine flu is common in pigs. The H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu) is a new strain capable of producing flu and viral pneumonia in humans.
- Swine influenza symptoms in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza infection and include fever, cough, headache, general aches and fatigue. Some people with swine flu have also reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

How do people get the H1N1 flu (human swine flu) virus?

- Human infections with flu viruses from pigs can occur when people are in close proximity to infected pigs, such as in pig production barns and livestock exhibits at fairs. Human-to-human transmission is also possible.
- Influenza and other respiratory infections are transmitted from person to person via the respiratory route. Coughs and sneezes release the germs into the air where they can be breathed in by others.
- Germs rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system when someone touches their mouth and/or nose.

Can I get the H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu) from eating pork?

- No. The H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu) is not a food safety concern.
- Proper cooking of pork products would kill any viruses. Additionally, swine exhibiting symptoms of influenza would not pass tests to enter into the food market.

What if I have returned from travelling and have symptoms of a respiratory illness?

- If you have recently been to Mexico, the U.S. or any other region where H1N1 flu cases are being reported (now most parts of the world), and are exhibiting symptoms of respiratory illness with fever, you should get in contact with your health care professional or call 8-1-1 to discuss your symptoms. Make sure to tell your health care professional about your travel history.

Will government be issuing a travel advisory?

- The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has advised Canadians that it is no longer recommending postponing non-essential travel to Mexico.
- The WHO is monitoring the situation closely.
- Travellers should follow the same precautionary measures that are recommended to protect against seasonal influenza – practicing frequent hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, and staying home when ill.

Are B.C.'s First Nations communities at a higher risk from the H1N1 flu virus?

- B.C. has an extremely vigilant and responsive public health system in place that alerts us to any influenza-like illnesses throughout the entire province, including First Nations communities.
- As soon as the Province learned about H1N1, all First Nations communities in the province were contacted through the First Nations Health Council and made aware of the situation.
- B.C. is the only province with a formal Tripartite Agreement in place that ensures First Nations communities have a strong and close relationship with the regional health authorities and Health Canada and can therefore access information and services quickly and efficiently.

Where I can find more information?

- Factsheets, resources and updates on the H1N1 flu virus (human swine flu) are available at www.gov.bc.ca/swineflu.
- Call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 or visit www.healthlinkbc.ca, 24 hours a day/seven days a week if they have questions/concerns, or if feeling ill
- Learn how to protect yourself against flu at <http://fightflu.ca/index-eng.html>.

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Contact: Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport
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