

H1N1 Fact Sheet

Updated: November 18, 2009

Self Care of H1N1 and other Influenza-like Illnesses (ILI)

Seasonal influenza and H1N1 are acute viral illnesses of the respiratory tract. Influenza has many strains. H1N1 is a new type.

Symptoms of H1N1: Fever or cough or both, with one or more of sore throat, head ache, muscle aches, joint aches, unusual tiredness, and in children under five years, vomiting and diarrhea.

If someone you know becomes sick, care for them in ways that reduce the risk of others getting sick. Pregnant women and people with severe chronic illness should avoid providing care to people with influenza-like illness if possible.

Here are 10 things you can do if you are sick or caring for a sick person:

- 1. Keep your distance.** Minimize contact with the sick person. Give care and comfort for the sick person, but do not stay with them at all times. Supervise sick children closely. Encourage the sick person to stay in their own room. This will reduce the spread the virus throughout the house. Encourage rest. Restrict visitors—use telephone, e-mail, or letters instead.
- 2. Wash your hands often.** Everyone in the home should wash their hands often or use an alcohol-based hand rub, even when hands look clean:
 - Before and after being close to someone who is sick
 - After being in a sick person's room or touching anything that a sick person has touched, such as dishes, towels, clothes, or trash
 - Before you prepare and eat food
 - Before touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
 - When coughing or sneezing into a tissue
- 3. Cover coughs and sneezes.** Encourage the sick person to cough and sneeze into a sleeve or tissue. This will reduce the spread of infection.
- 4. Stay at home until feeling well.** The sick person should not go out in public. They should not return to daycare, school, or work until they are feeling well and able to resume normal day-to-day activities. Health care workers should follow the policy of their employer.
- 5. Keep common surfaces clean.** Clean door knobs and light switches with regular household cleaning products at least once a day. Clean the phone or other surfaces after use by the sick person. Keep the sick person's things separate. Clean and disinfect items handled by the sick person before handling them. 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. Use a household cleaner on

bedside tables, bathroom surfaces, and children's toys. Wash linens, eating utensils, and dishes used by the sick person before they are used by others. Wash 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. 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 with a household cleaner or a mixture that is one part bleach and ten parts water.

6. **Drink fluids and eat nutritious foods.** Offer plenty of warm drinks, such as tea with honey and lemon, and chicken broth. These can soothe sore throats. Offer simple foods, such as cooked oatmeal, mashed vegetables, bananas, rice, apples, or toast.
7. **Open the windows.** Fresh air is best. If weather permits, open windows to keep rooms well ventilated.
8. **Keep the air smoke free.** Smoking and exposure to second hand smoke is especially hard on the lungs when there is an infection. Ensure that no one smokes near the sick person.
9. **Treat the fever.** Fever often comes with chills or aches and pains. Acetaminophen or ibuprofen may help bring down the fever and take away the aches. For children, acetaminophen is recommended. If you are using ibuprofen with children, only give it to them if they are drinking lots of fluids. 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. When taking medication, follow the instructions on the label or the directions given by your health care provider.
10. **Be on alert for complications.** Most people will begin to feel better after a few days. Sometimes complications develop, such as pneumonia. Asthma, diabetes, and heart disease may worsen. Contact a health care provider if the sick person
 - Starts to feel better, then fever returns and illness worsens
 - Experiences wheezing, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing
 - Notices blood in the phlegm
 - Experiences chest pain
 - Is hard to wake up, unusually quiet, or unresponsive
 - Experiences hallucinations
 - Has new onset of diarrhea, vomiting, or abdominal pain after starting to feel better

If you or the person you are caring for is **pregnant**, 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, most cases we have seen in Nova Scotia have been typical flu-like illness that 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 sick, stay home until you are feeling well. Follow the medical advice given to you.

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

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

