



October 2, 2009

H1N1, 2009-2010 influenza, what you need to know!

This document is intended to give basic information to answer questions from students, faculty, and staff regarding both seasonal influenza (flu) and H1N1 (originally called *swine flu*). Following the guidelines in this document will help to prevent and minimize the spread of influenza in the classroom, in the Residence, and protect the health of students, faculty and staff.

H1N1 has been highly publicized since it appeared in the Spring of 2009, with students in Nova Scotia affected. It is difficult to imagine that anyone is not aware of H1N1, but we need to take this seriously and to change/modify/improve our personal habits so that we ensure our health and the health of others.

References, Contacts, and Links

There is a huge amount of written material available about H1N1, and there is information almost every day in the newspapers, television, and on the Internet. This document was created by using information available, as noted below.

- *Province of Nova Scotia*: <http://www.gov.ns.ca/hpp>
- *Government of Canada, Public Health Agency*:
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/h1n1/index-eng.php>
- *Centre for Disease Control*: <http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu>
- *Ebsco*: <http://hldemo.ebscohost.com/Influenza/PERC?id=2010265638>
- *Saint Mary's University*: <http://www.smu.ca/health/news.html>
- *Dalhousie University*: <http://www.flu.dal.ca>
- *Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University*:
<http://www.nscad.ca/en/home/abouttheuniversity/news/h1n1.aspx>
- *Mount Saint Vincent University*:
<http://www.msvu.ca/mediacentre/H1N1%202009/H1N1.asp>

What is H1N1?

H1N1 is a flu virus, which presents as a respiratory illness that cause symptoms similar to those of the regular human seasonal flu. It has been reported around the entire world, so World Health Organization (WHO) has declared it a pandemic influenza virus. It

appeared around the globe faster than any previously tracked virus. It has been commonly called “Swine Flu” because it is a strain of influenza which usually affects pigs. Different strains of influenza commonly circulate in our environment, including strains which affect humans, birds, and pigs.

This virus is contagious. Most people who have already been affected have not been in contact with pigs. The virus spreads from *person to person*, much in the same way as regular seasonal influenza.

This strain of H1N1 is a new influenza, and therefore people will have no natural immunity against the virus.

The majority of cases in Canada have not been severe, with those affected experiencing mild illness. There have been deaths reported related to the incidence of H1N1, however, in most cases there were significant underlying health issues. The epidemiology thus far is that the most severe is for those persons who are immuno-compromised, pregnant women, and younger persons up to age 24.

The incubation period is understood to be up to four (4) days and communicability up to seven (7) days from onset of symptoms in uncomplicated cases. Consistent with seasonal flu, transmission of the H1N1 influenza virus is most likely during the initial days of infection when the individuals are symptomatic and have a high viral load, and also likely 1-2 days after symptoms have abated.

What are the Symptoms?

The symptoms of both seasonal Flu and H1N1 are similar.

- They are fever and cough, along with one or more of the following:
- Unusual tiredness
- Headache(s)
- Muscle aches and/or joint aches
- Sore throat
- Vomiting and diarrhea (in children less than five (5) years of age)

What we as individuals can do to prevent/minimize getting the H1N1 virus.

The best practices to reduce the spread of H1N1 are three major, but simple categories which should be normal practice for all people, all the time. **They are good hand hygiene, cough/sneeze etiquette, and staying at home when you are ill.**

Persons should monitor themselves for symptoms of any illness like influenza (ILI), on a regular basis, as it can reduce the risk of transmission to others. Reporting symptoms is an important part of the protocol for this influenza.

Good Hand hygiene is the single most important measure for preventing spread of infections. All persons are encouraged to practice hand hygiene frequently: either by

washing with soap and warm running water for 15-20 seconds, or using an alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) sanitizer.

Please note that ABHR is not a substitute for washing with soap, as it does not actually clean the hands. ABHR should be used in situations when hand washing with soap and water is not possible, and the hands are not visibly dirty.

Good hand hygiene should be practiced:

- Before and after food preparation
- before eating a meal or snacks
- after using the toilet
- after sneezing or coughing
- after wiping the nose
- before/after using shared computers or other shared equipment, etc.

Cough and Sneeze (respiratory) etiquette is important and persons are encouraged to cough and/or sneeze into their sleeve (not their hands) or to cover their nose and mouth with a tissue or handkerchief, when coughing or sneezing. (Remember you'll need to wash that clothing as soon as possible afterwards, especially in warm soapy water).

Stay home when ill. Persons who are symptomatic of H1N1 or other influenza need to be able to recognize the symptoms, and stay home until they are two days post fever, and are feeling better. Some individuals will experience a cough for days or weeks after infection, and presence of a cough in the absence of other symptoms, should not prevent persons returning to school.

Get immunized (a flu shot). The School has been in touch with the local office of the Victoria Order of Nurses (VON), like we do every year. We have been advised that immunization will not be available for the regular flu until October, and for that we have planned a clinic at AST in early November. At this time, the Department of Health of the Province of Nova Scotia, is expecting immunization for H1N1 no earlier than December 2009, but have promised sufficient supply. When these immunizations are available, you will have a number of choices as to when and how to obtain the injection, including your family doctor, and on-site clinics at the various Universities.

Over the counter or prescribed medications. Canada's Public Health Agency advises that two prescription antiviral drugs appear to be effective in treating the H1N1 virus. The common name of those drugs is *Tamiflu* and *Relenza*. The Agency recommends that these not be used for preventative purposes, or for mild cases, but that they are used when the case is moderate to severe, or that the person is a great risk for complications. Over the counter medications might reduce the symptoms slightly.

What the School will do to prevent/minimize the spread of the H1N1 virus.

The influenza virus can survive up to forty-eight (48) hours on different surfaces, so proper cleaning can reduce the spread. The virus is easily killed by regular commercially available cleaning products, and does not require special cleaning agents or disinfectants.

The School will clean surfaces in high traffic areas daily, such as: Push bars on doors, door handles, light switches, taps and sinks, photocopier buttons, printer/fax buttons, handrails on stairwells, refrigerator handles, counters in various areas, telephone receivers, keyboards & mouse, tables, desks and the like. Garbage will be removed and discarded daily or as appropriate, and garbage bags will not be reused.

All of this will be very taxing on the few environment staff employed at AST, so we will need assistance from everyone to ensure individual work areas are maintained, as described above.

What to do if you get sick with the virus.

- **If you get ill while in class**, you should leave the classroom as soon as possible.
- You are advised **not to travel** to other parts of the country or to other countries while you are ill.
- **For anyone living off campus**, the answer to this is simple, go home, and arrange to take care of yourself. You need to advise the School that you are ill, and when you return as well.
- **If you are living in Residence**, it has been highly recommended to us that persons isolate themselves, as much as practical. With students in the AST residence, that works well with no more than one person in a room/apartment. While access to washrooms will not be a problem, we need to clean those areas more regularly than usual. You need to communicate that you are ill to the Residence Don or Co-Don, and you need to ensure that you have access to food, water, and any medications. You need to continue to practice good hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

Reporting requirements

We are obliged to report illnesses in excess of 10%, so in the case of faculty and staff, that's three (3) people off at the same time. On the other hand, 10% also applies to students, so that roughly 15 persons off at the same time. However, it's not clear that does or does not include our Summer/Distance students. Our belief is that we will not have to count them, unless they are located in Nova Scotia.

Department managers will be responsible for reporting absences of Faculty and/or staff, due to H1N1 on a daily basis, to the Chief Administrative Officer, who will report it to the Department of Health.

It will be a bit more complicated for recording student absences due to H1N1, but Faculty will need to help us keep that information. We'll arrange a reporting mechanism through the Registrar, with accountability to the Chief Administrative Officer, who will report to the Department of Health.

Business Continuity planning

The School plans to continue normal operations up to that point when it is deemed not practical. We are prepared to continue classes online, if on campus is not practical. We have already prepared a communications protocol.

Operational continuity is also a priority especially where we need to continue payroll and payment of suppliers and services. During the summer every year we have reduced numbers of employees due to vacations, so we already have experience in maintaining normal operations. Having said that, there is always the possibility that we will not be able to cover some responsibility, and that may lead to decisions at the time to consider a delay, or an alternate arrangement.

The Library has special services for students who are ill with H1N1 yet still well enough to do research from home, or who have to stay at home to care for someone else. If you need help with research or accessing research and study materials, we can help you either on the phone, through email, or via chat software. We can even meet you online in your web browser using either Internet Explorer or Firefox! Contact the library at (902) 423-2427 or (902) 423-7986 or email knoseworthy@astheology.ns.ca.

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