

## **INFLUENZA A H1N1 (SWINE ORIGIN INFLUENZA VIRUS) Update**

### **What does Pandemic Level 6 mean?**

The World Health Organization has determined that the current situation with H1N1 influenza A virus fulfills the criteria for declaring Pandemic Phase 6. At this time, Alberta will continue with what is in place right now - surveillance for severe illness and changes in who is being affected, both of which could signal a change in the virulence of the virus. The evolving situation continues to be monitored closely.

### **Has there been a change in the type of disease we are seeing?**

No, the majority of cases in Alberta are mild influenza illness - fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches and fatigue for up to about seven days, improving spontaneously with full recovery. As with all influenza, there is a small proportion of people who do develop more severe disease. Those at increased risk for more severe disease are those with other underlying medical conditions.

### **What should you do during a pandemic?**

Be alert to information on radio, television, in newspapers, or the internet and elsewhere. Alberta Health and Wellness and Alberta Health Services will advise you about the steps you can take to avoid disease, vaccine and antiviral drug availability, and any changes that may be made in health-care services to deal with the pandemic.

There are things you can do to control the spread of influenza and take care of yourself and your family:

- Cover your nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing ; and
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water – this is one of the best defences against influenza.

If you develop influenza:

- Rest;
- Avoid contact with others while contagious ( about 5 days after the start of symptoms) if possible;
- Drink extra fluids;
- Treat symptoms with over-the-counter (non-prescription) medication with careful attention to the guidelines included with the medications;
- Throw away tissues after wiping your nose;
- Wash your hands frequently and always after coughing, sneezing or using tissues;
- Cover your nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing;
- Keep your fingers away from your eyes, nose and mouth; and
- Know how to take care of yourself and your family if you have influenza.
- If you have any other questions, contact Health Link at (1-866-408-LINK(5465))

### **How can individuals and families prepare for a pandemic?**

Albertans can prepare for a pandemic influenza just like they would for other emergencies by preparing a basic emergency kit to be self-sufficient for 72 hours. Key items to put in the kit include:

- Water- at least 2 litres of water per person per day. Include small bottles that can be carried easily in case of an evacuation order;
- Food that won't spoil, such as canned food, energy bars and dried foods (remember to replace the food and water once a year);
- Manual can-opener.
- Flashlights and batteries;
- Candles and matches or lighter (remember when using candles to place them in sturdy containers and to put them out before going to sleep);
- Battery-powered radio (and extra batteries) or wind-up radio;
- First aid kit;

- Special items such as prescription medications, infant formula and equipment for people with disabilities;
- Extra keys for car and house;
- Some cash in smaller bills, such as \$10 bills and change for payphones; and
- A copy of your emergency plan and contact information.

### **What about vaccine?**

Immunization of those susceptible to influenza is the primary means to decrease illness and death from influenza during a pandemic. Therefore, the main control strategy for pandemic influenza in Alberta is immunization with pandemic influenza-specific vaccine. However, because production of the vaccine can only be started once the pandemic influenza virus has been confirmed, it may take 4-6 months for vaccine to become available.

Until vaccine is available, Alberta will rely upon alternate control strategies in the early days of pandemic influenza. Supporting strategies include antiviral medication for early treatment of those ill with influenza, self-care, infection control precautions and public health measures to decrease transmission opportunities.

Once the vaccine is available, Alberta Health Services will manage vaccine administration and work in advance with City authorities to identify sites to provide pandemic influenza immunization to Albertans.

### **When to take medical care for an adult?**

Adults with influenza should seek medical care if they have heart or lung disease or any other chronic condition that requires regular medical attention. They should also seek care if they are frail, or if they have an illness or are on treatments that suppress the immune system.

See a physician immediately if you, or a person in your care, have any one of the following symptoms:

- Shortness of breath while resting or doing very little,
- Difficult or painful breathing,
- Coughing up bloody sputum,
- Wheezing,
- Chest pain,
- Fever for 3-4 days without improvements,
- Feeling better then suddenly having a high fever or becoming ill again,
- Extreme drowsiness and difficulty awakening,
- Disorientation or confusion,
- Severe earache,
- Sudden inability to function in a normally independent elderly person,
- Constant vomiting, especially in an elderly person.

### **Where can I get more information?**

- To learn more, contact your doctor or speak to a nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling: Alberta Health Link toll free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465). Mandarin Health Link Calgary at 403-943-1554, Cantonese Health Link Calgary at 403-943-1556
- Public Health Agency of Canada website, [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca)
- Alberta Health Services website, [www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca)

If you want to read any of the previous ‘Road To Healthy Living’ series articles, please go to [http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/diversity/multilingual\\_health\\_services.htm](http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/diversity/multilingual_health_services.htm) and get health information in your own language