

A/H1N1 Influenza Virus - The Facts

by Lea Kulmatycki, WFSC President

The A/H1N1 Influenza virus is still making the news. And with good reason. It is spreading quickly, particularly among the 10 to 45 age group and people who have pre-existing conditions - such as cardiovascular disease, respiratory problems, diabetes, and cancer. The World Health Organization considers this virus to be at a phase 6. While Alberta Health Services has plans in place should the severity of the virus increase, there are simple steps everyone can take to avoid the spread of the A/H1N1 Influenza virus. Everyone should know the facts to help contain this virus.

What is the H1N1 Virus? It is a new influenza virus that is spread from person-to-person through coughing, sneezing, or talking. You can also contract the virus by touching contaminated surfaces such as someone's hand or a piece of paper a person with the virus had recently handled, then touching your mouth or nose before hand washing.

Why is it a problem? Since it is a new virus, most people will have little or no immunity. This means it could cause more infections; which it has. Spread of the A/H1N1 Influenza virus during a six week period is comparable to a six month spread for past pandemic viruses.

How can I protect myself? Avoid touching your face. Clean your hands thoroughly and regularly. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are unavailable. Avoid crowded places and contact with people you think may be ill. Open windows and improve the airflow in your home. Continue to practice good general health habits - eat right, stay physically active and get enough sleep.

How will I know if I have A/H1N1 Influenza ? The seasonal flu and the H1N1 virus both exhibit the same symptoms- fever, cough, headache, body aches, sore throat and runny nose. There can sometimes be vomiting and diarrhea. Only a doctor can diagnose the H1N1 virus.

What should I do if I think I have H1N1? Treat yourself as you would if you had a seasonal flu. Stay at home and avoid contact with other people. Rest and take plenty of fluids. If necessary, use a pain reliever for aches and pains. Minimize the spread of germs by coughing or sneezing into the crook of your arm, not your hand. Interesting Fact: People over the age of 30 cover their mouth with their hand when they cough while the under 30 crowd cough into the crook of their

arm. Coughing into the crook of your arm reduces the spread of germs. Coughing into your hand requires immediate hand washing to avoid infecting everything you touch.

When should I seek medical attention? If you experience shortness of breath or have difficulty breathing, contact your doctor immediately. The same applies if you have a fever that lasts for more than three days. As with all illnesses, you know your body best. If something doesn't feel right, contact your doctor immediately. People with pre-existing conditions need to take extra care. Remember to wear a mask when visiting a health care facility to avoid spreading the virus to others.

For more information or advice, contact: toll-free 1-866-408-LINK (5465) or www.healthlinkalberta.ca