

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

May 5, 2009

Ministry of Education

### **FOR STUDENTS: INFLUENZA A H1N1 (HUMAN SWINE FLU)**

#### **Q1:What is the H1N1 flu virus?**

- The H1N1 swine flu is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by the type A influenza virus that regularly infects pigs.
- While swine flu viruses don't normally infect humans, changes to the virus have allowed this current strain to do so.

#### **Q2:How does it spread?**

- The human H1N1 flu virus, like other flu viruses, spreads mainly through the coughing or sneezing of a person infected with the flu virus.
- People may become infected by touching something with the flu virus or germs on it and then touching their mouth or nose.
- Germs on hard surfaces, such as counters and doorknobs, can be picked up on hands and spread when people touch their nose or mouth.

#### **Q3:Can you get the H1N1 flu virus from eating pork or pork products?**

- No. Proper cooking of pork products would kill any viruses in the meat.

#### **Q4:Someone coughed on me. Will I get sick?**

- A lot of people are coughing and sneezing this time of year, but just because they are, it doesn't mean they have the H1N1 flu virus.
- The likelihood is extremely low and it is unlikely the person had the H1N1 flu virus as B.C. still has a relatively low count of confirmed cases. So wash your hands often. Alcohol based hand sanitizers are also effective.
- If you feel sick, let your parents know and stay home from school. If your symptoms get worse, phone your health care provider.

#### **Q5:What are the symptoms?**

- The symptoms of the H1N1 flu virus are similar to the symptoms of regular flu. They include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue and, occasionally, vomiting and diarrhea.

#### **Q6:Is it deadly? Should I be worried?**

- In general, around 800 people in B.C. die each year from the seasonal flu and pneumonia.
- The majority of the H1N1 flu virus cases in Canada have been mild so far and all patients are either recovering or have already recovered.
- It is important to be aware of what steps you can take to prevent the spread of this or any other flu virus.

**Q7:What can I do to protect myself and others?**

- Here are some practical ways you can help prevent the spread of infection:
  - o Wash your hands frequently, especially before eating;
  - o Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth;
  - o Don't share the same cup or share utensils with other people;
  - o Sneeze into a tissue instead of your hands and then throw the tissue away;
  - o Try to avoid close contact with sick people; and
  - o Tell your parents if you don't feel well and stay home from school if you are sick.

**Q8:Will wearing a mask help?**

- Masks might help prevent a sick person from spreading the virus, and medical personnel might benefit by wearing special equipment including masks, but masks are not a proven means of prevention for the general public.
- The best way to avoid getting sick is to practice good hygiene and cleanliness and to avoid contact with people who are sick.

**Q9:My school has closed, but I'm not sick - can I still go out?**

- Even if you're not experiencing flu-like symptoms, as a preventative measure, you should consider limiting your exposure to large groups during the week your school is closed.

**Q10:Is there a cure for the H1N1 flu virus?**

- Right now, there is no vaccine to protect against the current strain of H1N1.
- It is important to take common sense precautions to prevent the spread of this or any other flu virus, such as:
  - o Wash your hands frequently, especially before eating;
  - o Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth;
  - o Don't share the same cup or share utensils with other people;
  - o Sneeze into a tissue instead of your hands and then throw the tissue away;
  - o Try to avoid close contact with sick people; and
  - o Tell your parents if you don't feel well and stay home from school if you are sick.

**Q11:I just got back from vacation. Should I be worried? Should I stay home from school?**

- Regardless of where you've travelled, if you are feeling well and not showing any flu symptoms, you can go to school as usual.
- If you are feeling sick, regardless of whether you've travelled or not, you should let your parents know and stay home from school.

**Q12:My friends just came back from Mexico. Can I still hang out with them?**

- It doesn't matter where people have been, if someone is sick with flu-like symptoms, it's best to stay clear until they are feeling well again.

**Q13:Lots of kids are home sick from school; will my school be closing?**

- Week-long school closures are a precautionary measure that may be considered to help reduce the spread of the H1N1 flu virus.
- If you feel sick, let your parents know and stay home. If your symptoms get worse, you can call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1. If they persist, phone your health care provider before going to the clinic.

**Q14:Where can I go for more information?**

- Get the latest facts at [www.gov.bc.ca/swineflu](http://www.gov.bc.ca/swineflu).
- If you are feeling ill or have questions or concerns, you can call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1, 24 hours a day/seven days a week if you have questions or concerns, or if you are feeling ill.
- You can also get more information by visiting [www.facebook.com/h1n1informationbc](http://www.facebook.com/h1n1informationbc), or by following H1N1BC on Twitter.