

# **OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH ADVISORY**

## **Regions and Programs Branch Workplace Health and Public Safety Programme (WHPSP)**

**Interim Occupational Health Advice for Public Servants Working or Traveling to Areas outside of Canada with Severe Respiratory Illness from H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza)**

**MAY 1, 2009**

**SUBJECT: H1N1 FLU VIRUS (HUMAN SWINE INFLUENZA)/SEVERE RESPIRATORY INFECTION**

**This guidance document is being provided by Health Canada in response to the recent outbreak of human swine H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) in North America. This guidance has been developed to assist federal employees whose work location places them at higher risk for developing Severe Respiratory Illness from H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza). This guidance is based on current available scientific evidence about this emerging disease, and is subject to review and change as new information becomes available.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) is caused by a novel virus with the ability to spread person to person. H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) has been reported in Canada, Mexico, United States and a number of other countries. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is working collaboratively with Mexican, American and World Health Organization officials to further investigate this situation. This interim guidance is intended to provide specific recommendations for federal public servants working or traveling to areas affected by the Severe Respiratory Infection caused by H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza). The content of this document is largely based on the general recommendations included in the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector. It is expected that this occupational health guidance may change as further information about the epidemiology (e.g., mode transmission) and clinical course (e.g., mild or severe disease) of this novel virus is available.

Canadian Public Servants living or traveling in other areas without Severe Respiratory Illness should follow other guidance for travel and for H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza).

### **ASSUMPTIONS**

**The following are assumptions, based on current available scientific evidence, used to make recommendations in this document:**

- Based on preliminary epidemiologic evidence, the high risk groups for poor outcome of H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) are consistent with the high risk groups identified for seasonal influenza. (See Section 2 below for further information on high risk groups or see: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/iif-vcg/gs-pg-eng.php#ac.>)
- The symptoms of H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) in people are similar to the symptoms

of seasonal influenza (Influenza-like illness or ILI) and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, general body aches. (Note: in children under 5, gastrointestinal symptoms may also be present.) In people under age 5 or 65 and older, fever may not be prominent.

- Like seasonal influenza, H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) can vary in severity from mild to severe.
- Human-to-human transmission of H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) is occurring.
- Human-to-human transmission of H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) occurs in the same way as seasonal influenza, i.e. mainly through coughing or sneezing by infected people.
- The seasonal influenza vaccine is unlikely to provide protection against H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza).
- H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) is sensitive to Oseltamivir and Zanamivir.
- H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) flu virus is resistant to amantadine and rimantidine.
- People with H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) are infectious for up to 7 days following the onset of symptoms.
- Transmission is possible while asymptomatic but it is more efficient when symptoms such as coughing, are present and viral shedding is high (i.e. early in symptomatic period).

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

These specific recommendations are based on information as of April 29, 2009 and apply only to Canadian public servants working in Mexico at this time. This Advisory may apply to Canadian public servants in other missions if severe respiratory illness due to H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza) occurs outside of Mexico.

You are advised to follow local public health authorities’ recommendations and those found on the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) website. Since PHAC recommendations are targeted to Canadians living in Canada, their information may differ from that of local health authorities abroad. In Mexico, most federal employees are not at greater risk than the local public and should follow (local) public health advisories.

Federal public servants in Mexico are advised to follow the recommendations set out below which are similar to the recommendations given to all individuals living abroad during seasonal influenza season, including those who must meet and deal with travellers or local inhabitants who present to the mission.

<b>Section 1</b>	
<b>Public Servant residing in Mexico (or other areas with Severe Respiratory Illness as a result of H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza))</b>	
<b>A. Work involves no contact with public</b>	<b>B. Work involves contact with general public</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Get the seasonal influenza vaccine.</li> <li>2. All employees and dependants should regularly wash hands with soap and water or use an alcohol based hand rub (60-90%) Hand washing is the best method of preventing the spread of infectious disease.</li> <li>3. Avoid crowded places and gatherings where you may come in contact with infected</li> </ol>	<p><b>In addition to the information in Section A, if an ill individual presents to you for services at your workplace:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The best procedure is to ask the person to seek medical attention and come back when well. If the person requires immediate mission assistance, maintain a distance of 2 meters from ill person. Wash your hands frequently and after handling documents of ill person.</li> </ol>

individuals.

4. Should you develop a mild “cold” or influenza-like illness, you should stay home, isolating yourself from the workplace and, as much as possible, from others. Should you develop more serious symptoms (high fever, chills, cough, moderate to severe body aches, significant fatigue, diarrhea or vomiting) you should contact a health professional without delay. You should then be assessed regarding the need to take antiviral medications, which must be taken within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms to be most effective.
5. If, however, you have **medical conditions or other factors (e.g., age) which place you in a high risk group for complications from seasonal influenza** (see section 2-B), you should contact a health professional without delay, even if you have a mild “cold” or influenza like illness (see ‘assumptions’ above for symptoms). You should be assessed as to whether you should receive antiviral medications. If such medications are prescribed, you should contact mission administration to determine how to obtain medication.

Wash with soap and water or if running water is not easily available use alcohol based hand rub (60-90%) if hands are not visibly soiled. Frequent hand washing is important. You should avoid touching face, mouth, nose and eyes with unwashed or gloved hands.

2. Have the ill person don (wear) a surgical mask. If they are unable to do this, have them cover their mouth and nose and cough into a tissue or the inside of their elbow.
3. Place ill person in an area or room away from others.
4. Call Appropriate Medical Personnel to assess. If needed, call Ambulance or First Responders.
5. If you are required to spend time in close contact (less than two meters away) with the ill person (e.g. in a separate room or because you are restraining the person), the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) recommends that a federal employee wear respiratory protection. The choice between a surgical mask and N95 respirator should be based on the following:

Wear a **surgical mask** when:

- the ill person is willing and able to comply with respiratory hygiene practices (e.g. wear a surgical mask); **or**
- the ill person has a weak or no cough.

Wear a **N95 respirator** when

- the ill person is coughing forcefully **and** is unable or unwillingly to comply with the respiratory hygiene (e.g., coughing patient who is unable or unwilling to wear a surgical mask

The employee should also wear gloves and eye protection (e.g. goggles or safety glasses that seal to the face). Gloves and respirators/masks must be properly

	<p>disposed of after use and hands should be washed again. Goggles should be disinfected after use.</p> <p>At the end of the close contact with the ill person, after leaving the room, the N95 respirator/ surgical mask should be removed by the straps, being careful not to touch the mask or respirator itself. It should be disposed of in a hands-free waste receptacle.</p>
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<p align="center"><b>Section 2</b></p>	
<p align="center"><b>Public Servant travelling to Mexico (or other areas with Severe Respiratory Illness as a result of H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza))</b></p>	
<p><b>A. Posting with or without dependants</b></p>	<p><b>B. Short-term work-related travel</b></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. You will be assessed in the NCR Clinic, and you may receive travel medicine services in the NCR Clinic or, if living outside the NCR, you may be referred to another facility with expertise in travel medicine where information on affected areas will be provided.</li> <li>2. Before your posting to Mexico commences, you should receive a seasonal influenza vaccine if one has not already been administered to you.</li> <li>3. Follow the advice in Section 1 above.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Currently, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) recommends that non-essential travel to Mexico be postponed. The most recent information on travel can be found at: <a href="http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/pub-eng.php">http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/pub-eng.php</a></b></p> <p><b>If you must go to Mexico (or other areas which may be declared to have Severe Respiratory Illness as a result of H1N1 Flu Virus (Human Swine Influenza))</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Receive the seasonal influenza vaccine and any other immunizations and advice appropriate for travel to the particular area.</li> <li>2. If you have <b>medical conditions or other factors (e.g., age) which place you in a high risk group for complications from seasonal influenza</b> you should also seek specific advice from your own health professional and/or a health professional with expertise in travel medicine. People with increased risk from seasonal influenza include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals aged 6-23 years.</li> <li>• Adults and children with chronic diseases significant enough to require medical attention or hospital care.</li> <li>• People with chronic diseases or</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

	<p>conditions such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, asthma as well as diabetes, cystic fibrosis, anemia, weakened immune system, HIV or kidney disease.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Seniors</li></ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>3. Wash\clean your hands as explained in Section 1 above. You should avoid touching your face, mouth, nose and eyes with unwashed or gloved hands.</li><li>4. Avoid crowded places and gatherings where you may come in contact with infected individuals.</li><li>6. Should you develop a mild “cold” or influenza-like illness, you should stay home, isolating yourself from the workplace and, as much as possible, from others. Should you develop more serious symptoms (high fever, chills, cough, moderate to severe body aches, significant fatigue, diarrhea or vomiting) you should contact a health professional without delay. You should then be assessed regarding the need to take antiviral medications, which must be taken within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms to be most effective, but which may also be prescribed after this period.</li><li>7. If, however, you have <b>medical conditions or other factors (e.g., age) which place you in a high risk group for complications from seasonal influenza</b>, you should contact a health professional without delay, even if you have a mild “cold” or influenza like illness (see ‘assumptions’ above for symptoms). You should be assessed as to whether you should receive antiviral medications. If such medications are prescribed, you should contact mission administration to determine how to obtain medication.</li></ol>
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As we learn more about the situation, we will provide you with updates on this advice.