
INFORMATION BULLETIN

2009HSERV0001-000004
Feb. 2, 2010

Ministry of Health Services
Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport

H1N1 FLU VIRUS (HUMAN SWINE FLU) UNDER SURVEILLANCE

Update: 12 p.m., Feb. 2, 2010

VICTORIA – The Province continues to monitor and respond to the spread of the pandemic H1N1 flu virus. In B.C., the second wave of the H1N1 pandemic has peaked and now officially passed. Currently, influenza activity in the province is well below historic norms.

Since Jan. 26, there has been one new severe case of H1N1 identified in B.C. – in the Interior Health region. No deaths have been attributed to this reporting period. However, one death in Interior Health has now been attributed to a previous reporting week.

The majority of lab-confirmed cases in B.C. have been mild or moderate in severity, with the patients either having already recovered or currently recovering. While the Province continues to monitor all laboratory-confirmed cases, the weekly report includes only severe confirmed H1N1 cases (hospitalizations and deaths).

Please note, this week's report will be the last regular update, but the [BC Centre for Disease Control](#) will continue to post influenza surveillance bulletins online.

How many severe cases of the H1N1 flu virus are there in B.C.?

- Since Jan. 26, there has been one new severe case of H1N1 identified in B.C. No deaths have been attributed to this reporting period.
- In total, BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) has confirmed 1,059* severe H1N1 cases in British Columbia since April 2009, including:
 - 360 in Fraser Health, including 17 deaths.
 - 235 in Interior Health, including 15* deaths.
 - 70* in Northern Health, including two deaths.
 - 242 in Vancouver Coastal Health, including 10 deaths.
 - 152 on Vancouver Island, including 12 deaths.
- To date, 56* laboratory-confirmed H1N1 cases in B.C. are reported to have died. Of those, 49 cases had underlying medical conditions, while five had no underlying conditions. Two cases are still under investigation.

* Detailed accounting of historical cases has resulted in slightly revised total counts for some health authorities. As well, one death in Interior Health has now been attributed to a previous reporting week.

When and where can I get the H1N1 vaccine?

The H1N1 flu vaccine is still available through public health units, physicians' offices and trained pharmacists. Use the [Flu Clinic Locator](#) to find the nearest public health unit or pharmacy, call your family physician or check your regional health authority's website for more information on receiving the vaccine.

Health authorities and physicians will be providing both seasonal influenza and H1N1 vaccine at least until March as per usual. People who get their H1N1 vaccine and for whom the seasonal flu vaccine is normally recommended are able to receive both shots at the same time.

Current status of outbreak

- On June 11, the World Health Organization (WHO) raised its alert level to phase 6 (the pandemic phase). The WHO considers the overall severity of the pandemic to be "moderate", which means that most people recover from infection without the need for hospitalization or medical care.
- To put the H1N1 outbreak in perspective, 400 to 800 people die in British Columbia from the seasonal flu or pneumonia each year.
- The most current confirmed severe case counts are available online for [Canada \(PHAC\)](#), the [U.S. \(CDC\)](#) and [internationally \(WHO\)](#).

Adverse events following immunization

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and Health Canada, with the collaboration of provinces and territories, the Canadian Paediatric Society and a network of researchers are actively monitoring all adverse events following immunization to the H1N1 flu vaccine in Canada.

The majority of adverse events are not serious and include soreness, swelling or redness at the injection site, fever, rash, headache or muscle aches and pains.

All adverse events are monitored and investigated and the complete [national vaccine surveillance report](#) is posted online each week.

How can I stop the spread of the H1N1 flu virus?

- Experts have determined that the H1N1 flu virus can spread relatively easily from person to person.
- **Stay home** from work or school if you are sick, regardless of where you have travelled, unless directed to seek medical care. Limit contact with others.
- Call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 if you have symptoms or concerns to speak to a nurse anytime of the day or night.
- See a health care provider if your symptoms become worse but call ahead to let them know you have fever or cough illness.
- Exercise commonsense precautionary measures:
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. When you cough, do so into your sleeve if possible.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze.

Who should be tested for the H1N1 flu virus?

- Our well-established surveillance system will continue to allow us to track both the spread and impact of the H1N1 flu virus in B.C. – but it is a system that doesn't rely on doing a lab test on everyone with influenza-like illness.
- Testing will be determined by a doctor on a case-by-case basis, based on consideration of the individual patient's situation and the presence of influenza in the community
- Patients who are not at high-risk for complications and who have only mild illness **do not require testing**, however, those with severe symptoms should seek medical attention.

What is H1N1 flu virus?

- While swine flu is common in pigs, this novel H1N1 flu virus is a new strain of virus capable of producing flu and viral pneumonia in humans.
- Symptoms of the novel H1N1 flu virus in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza infection and include fever, cough, headache, general aches and fatigue. Some people with the H1N1 flu have also reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

How do people get the H1N1 flu virus?

- Influenza and other respiratory infections are transmitted from person to person via the respiratory route. Coughs and sneezes release the germs into the air where they can be breathed in by others.
- Germs rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system when someone touches their mouth and/or nose.

Are B.C.'s First Nations communities at a higher risk from the H1N1 flu virus?

- B.C. has an extremely vigilant and responsive public health system in place that alerts us to any unusual patterns in influenza-like illnesses throughout the entire province, including First Nations communities.
- As soon as the Province learned about H1N1, all First Nations communities in B.C. were contacted through the First Nations Health Council and made aware of the situation.
- B.C. is the only province with a formal Tripartite Agreement in place that ensures First Nations communities have a strong and close relationship with the regional health authorities and Health Canada and can therefore access information and services quickly and efficiently.

Where I can find more information?

- Fact sheets, resources and updates on the H1N1 flu virus in B.C. are available at www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1.
- To find a local public health unit or qualified pharmacist where you can get the H1N1 vaccine, use the Flu Clinic Locator at www.immunizebc.ca. You can also phone your family doctor or local health authority for more information.
- Call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 or visit www.healthlinkbc.ca, 24 hours a day/seven days a week if you have questions/concerns or are feeling ill.
- Learn more about how to protect yourself against the flu at www.fightflu.ca.

Media Contact: Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport
Public Affairs Bureau
250 952-2387

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province's news feeds using RSS, visit the Province's website at www.gov.bc.ca.