
INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Health Services
Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport

H1N1 FLU VIRUS (HUMAN SWINE FLU) UNDER SURVEILLANCE

Update: 12 p.m., November 17, 2009

VICTORIA – British Columbia continues to monitor and respond to the spread of the pandemic H1N1 flu virus. Since Nov. 10, there have been 144 new severe cases of H1N1 identified in B.C. – 49 in Fraser Health, 42 in Vancouver Coastal Health, 30 in Interior Health, 15 on Vancouver Island and eight in Northern Health – with five new deaths, including two in Interior Health, one in Vancouver Coastal Health, one in Fraser Health and one on Vancouver Island. 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 now includes only severe confirmed H1N1 cases (hospitalizations and deaths). For more detailed surveillance data, visit www.bccdc.ca.

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

- Since Nov. 10, there have been 144 new severe cases of H1N1 identified in B.C., with five new deaths.
- In total, BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) has confirmed 755 severe H1N1 cases in British Columbia since April 2009, including:
 - 304 in Fraser Health, including 12 deaths.
 - 160 in Interior Health, including six deaths*.
 - 33 in Northern Health.
 - 203 in Vancouver Coastal Health, including seven deaths*.
 - 55 on Vancouver Island, including five deaths.
- To date, 30* laboratory-confirmed H1N1 cases in B.C. are reported to have died. Of those, 23 cases had underlying medical conditions while four had no underlying conditions. Investigation is still ongoing in the other three cases.

* Also added to this week's case count are two additional deaths – one in the Vancouver Coastal Health region and one in the Interior Health region. Both of these deaths occurred prior to last week, but were not reflected in the Nov. 10 information bulletin due to delays in health authority reporting. Investigations to determine if these cases had underlying health conditions are still ongoing (and are included in the totals above).

When and where can I get the H1N1 vaccine?

British Columbians can use the Flu Clinic Locator at www.immunizebc.ca to find out where to get the H1N1 vaccine. If there are no clinics posted in a particular area, people can call their public health unit or family physician to find out where and when they can get vaccinated.

Currently, the following groups are now eligible to receive the vaccine should they choose to do so:

- All persons over six months of age with chronic health conditions.
- Healthy children and adolescents from six months to 18 years of age, inclusive.
- Pregnant women.
- Persons – including First Nations – living in remote and isolated settings or communities
- Health care workers in critical areas such as the ER, ICU, specialized units with direct patient care, and all health-care workers employed in acute and long term facilities and in home care and public health.
- First responders (police, firefighters).
- Household contacts under 65 years of age of infants less than six months of age, and of persons who are immunocompromised.

People who fall into these groups AND for whom the seasonal flu vaccine is normally recommended will be able to receive both shots at the same time, provided that the seasonal vaccine is available in their area.

This means that as of now, the only people not eligible for the pandemic H1N1 vaccine are healthy adults who are not health-care workers as defined above. Please note that at this time, health-care workers in the community, such as dentists, physiotherapists, mental-health workers and others are not yet eligible for vaccination. They will become eligible when vaccine is available for all healthy adults.

Beginning in late November or early December, everyone else who needs and wants the H1N1 vaccine will be recommended to receive it. Public notification will happen at this time so that everyone is aware the vaccine is available to them.

Current status of outbreak

- On June 11, the World Health Organization (WHO) raised its alert level to phase 6 (the pandemic phase). So far, 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 \(WHO\)](#).

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 and the Province is still actively encouraging doctors and health-care providers to do H1N1 testing on any patient with severe respiratory illness.

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.

Why is the Province of B.C. no longer reporting individual case counts?

- The goal of surveillance is to systematically monitor the spread of the H1N1 flu virus so that effective public health interventions can be implemented to minimize its impact on society. Initially, it was important to understand how the virus was spreading, and what kind of illness it was causing. This is why B.C. did individual testing to laboratory-confirm cases of H1N1 flu virus.
- As a result of that testing, we now know now that the virus has spread around the province and is spreading like regular seasonal flu, with higher concentration in some regions.
- This transition is in line with PHAC's reporting and with the World Health Organization's recommendations that countries move away from trying to laboratory test all individual cases and move towards analyzing larger national indicators of disease.
- Clinicians and public health partners across the province have increased vigilance and will continue to report unusual clusters or cases of severe respiratory illnesses. BCCDC will continue to track the progress of both the H1N1 flu virus and seasonal influenza and make detailed surveillance reports available online at www.bccdc.ca.

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.
- 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.

Contact: Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport
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