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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health Services  
Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport  
BC Medical Association

### **PROVINCE SUPPORTS DOCTORS TO TREAT MORE H1N1 PATIENTS**

VICTORIA – In anticipation of a resurgence of the H1N1 virus, B.C. doctors will receive additional compensation to provide increased access to care for patients.

As part of an agreement between the Province and the BC Medical Association, two new temporary fee codes, “Telephone Advice Regarding H1N1 Virus” and “Office Visit for H1N1 Virus”, have been introduced into the Medical Services Commission payment schedule. The new fee codes will enable physicians to more appropriately diagnose and treat pandemic H1N1 patients.

“Providing the option of telephone advice for H1N1 patients is a sensible alternative to having symptomatic patients visiting a doctor’s office, while the 8-1-1 service remains available for general symptom queries from the public,” said provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall. “As we saw in the spring outbreak of H1N1, doctors play a critical role in treating H1N1 patients. Together, the two new measures offer H1N1 patients increased access to care.”

Both family physicians and specialists will be able to bill the “Telephone Advice Regarding H1N1 Virus” fee starting Oct. 1, 2009. The H1N1 office visit fee is a family-doctor-specific fee that is not subject to the daily volume office visit restriction. It will be turned on upon the advice of the provincial health officer when the number of flu cases exceeds the historical average of seasonal influenza cases.

“We are pleased to work with the BCMA in establishing new fee codes as one step in ensuring that physicians across the province have appropriate support to manage this year’s flu season,” said Health Services Minister Kevin Falcon.

Healthy Living and Sport Minister Ida Chong shares Falcon’s views.

“Increased access to health professionals will help ensure that public health and safety remains a priority and patients get the most appropriate care quickly,” said Chong.

Physicians will receive \$14.74 to provide telephone advice to high-risk patients with suspected or active H1N1 symptoms. This amount is equivalent to other telephone advice fees for B.C. doctors. Doctors will also receive \$31.15 for each H1N1 office visit, a fee rate that is equivalent to the weighted average of all age-related general office visits. Currently, there is a cap of a daily maximum of around 50 patients a day for office visits. The H1N1 office visit will be exempt from this cap.

The telephone advice fee is especially useful to physicians when they speak to their high-risk symptomatic patients who have received advanced anti-viral prescriptions and want to know if they need to fill their prescriptions and start taking the medication.

“If you’re sick with the flu, quite frankly the last thing you want to do is pack yourself up and head for the doctor’s office. In this instance, telephone advice makes perfect sense,” said Dr. Brian Brodie, president of the BC Medical Association. “If the doctor feels you should come in, then the visit can be arranged for a convenient time and co-ordinated to limit spreading the virus to other patients.”

The fee codes are specifically designed to support physicians in diagnosing and treating patients who have active symptoms of H1N1. Patients who feel they may have symptoms, or want general non-emergency health information on H1N1 may contact HealthLink BC by phoning 8-1-1 or visiting [www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca).

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