

What health care workers need to know about

Staying home sick with influenza



Health care workers play a key role in the fight against influenza. Not only do they help educate the public and care for people who are sick, but, by staying home when they themselves are sick, they help prevent the spread of this illness to vulnerable members of our population.

If you are sick

- Staff or volunteers that become ill with influenza-like illness (ILI) during a shift should be sent home immediately. If this is not possible, contact the infection control practitioner at your facility.
- Health care workers who are ill with ILI should be off work until 24 hours after all symptoms other than a mild cough have resolved, typically 5-8 days.
- If you have been exposed during an outbreak of lab confirmed influenza at your place of work,

you should not work at a different health care facility until you have had at least four (4) days without symptoms. If you have been immunized for seasonal influenza and for pandemic influenza, you may work at different facilities without restrictions.

Signs and symptoms

The symptoms of novel H1N1 in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal influenza and include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches
- Headache
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Diarrhea and vomiting in some people

How it is spread

- By coming into contact with droplets that have been sneezed or coughed into the air by someone with the flu; or
- By shaking hands with an infected person or touching a contaminated surface, and then touching your own eyes, nose or mouth.

The flu virus can survive for 24 – 48 hours on surfaces such as countertops and appliances; for 8 – 12 hours on cloth, paper and tissue; and for five minutes on hands.

Routine precautions

Remember, hand hygiene is the single most effective measure to reduce health care associated infections.

Routine Practices are based on the premise that all clients/patients/residents are potentially infectious, even when asymptomatic, and that the same safe standards of practice should be used routinely with all clients/patients/residents to prevent exposure to blood, body fluids, secretions, excretions, mucous membranes, non-intact skin or soiled items and to prevent the spread of microorganisms.

Routine precautions to be used with residents/patients with symptoms of respiratory illness include:

- Hand hygiene;
- Use of gloves and gown when providing direct care;
- Use of a mask. A fit-tested N95 respirator is required when pandemic H1N1 is suspected or confirmed.

Incubation and communicability

Currently there is information that the novel H1N1 virus may take anywhere from one (1) to four (4) days to cause symptoms.

You are able to spread the novel H1N1 virus to someone else up to 24 hours before you have symptoms and up to seven (7) days after symptoms start.

When you are sick at home

- Avoid contact with the rest of the family by using a separate bedroom and bathroom if possible. If you are sharing a bathroom, use separate towels.
- Cough into a tissue or your sleeve. Discard tissues immediately.

- Wash hands frequently using liquid soap and water or an alcohol hand sanitizer.
- Don't share anything that goes in your mouth, like utensils, drinking glasses or toothbrushes.
- Don't have visitors in the house.
- If you need to leave the house for a medical appointment, try to maintain a distance of at least two (2) meters or six (6) feet from others.

Getting treatment

Follow the advice of your health care provider.

You can also call Telehealth Ontario for advice at 1-866-797-0000.

Those with an underlying medical condition, who are pregnant, or are under the age of two or over 65, should consult with their health care provider.

More information

- Contact Oxford County Public Health & Emergency Services at 519 539-9800 or toll-free at 1 800 755-0394
- Visit the Oxford County website at www.oxfordcounty.ca/publichealth
- Visit the Public Health Agency of Canada website at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca