
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., Dec. 15, 2009

VICTORIA – British Columbia continues to monitor and respond to the spread of the pandemic H1N1 flu virus.

Since Dec. 8, there have been 23 new severe cases of H1N1 identified in B.C. – 16 on Vancouver Island, four in Fraser Health, two in Interior Health and one in Vancouver Coastal Health – with two new deaths in Vancouver Coastal Health. 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 Dec. 8, there have been 23 new severe cases of H1N1 identified in B.C., with two new deaths.
- In total, BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) has confirmed 1,032 severe H1N1 cases in British Columbia since April 2009, including:
 - 358 in Fraser Health, including 17 deaths.
 - 233 in Interior Health, including 13* deaths.
 - 44 in Northern Health, including two deaths.
 - 258 in Vancouver Coastal Health, including nine deaths.
 - 139 on Vancouver Island, including 10 deaths.
- To date, 51* laboratory-confirmed H1N1 cases in B.C. are reported to have died. Of those, 44 cases had underlying medical conditions while five had no underlying conditions. Two cases are still under investigation.

* Also added to this week's case count are two additional deaths – both in the Interior Health region. Both of these deaths occurred prior to last week, but were not reflected in the Dec. 8 information bulletin due to delays in health authority reporting. Both cases had underlying health conditions.

When and where can I get the H1N1 vaccine?

As of Friday, Nov. 20, all British Columbians are now eligible to receive the H1N1 flu vaccine. Mass clinics will end on Friday, Dec. 18, but the H1N1 vaccine will still be available through physicians' offices and trained pharmacists.

British Columbians can use the Flu Clinic Locator at www.immunizebc.ca to find out where to get the H1N1 vaccine until public clinics end later this week. People can also call their public health unit or family physician or check their regional health authority's website to find out where and when they can get vaccinated.

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 \(WHO\)](#).

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.

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 public clinic where you can get the H1N1 vaccine, use the Flu Clinic Locator at www.immunizebc.ca.
- 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.

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Contact: Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport
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