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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
2009HLS0035-000623  
November 13, 2009

Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport

### **H1N1 VACCINE ELIGIBILITY GROUPS EXPAND**

VICTORIA – More British Columbians will be eligible to receive the H1N1 vaccine beginning Monday, Nov. 16 – including first responders, healthy children, seniors with chronic health conditions and additional health care workers.

“With the arrival of more vaccine in our province and today’s federal authorization of the unadjuvanted vaccine, we can expand our eligibility criteria by reaching out and offering immunization to even more British Columbians,” said Provincial Health Officer Dr. Perry Kendall. “The other good news is that, with the Public Health Agency of Canada announcing new dosing recommendations for children and expanding the use of the unadjuvanted vaccine to include healthy people between the ages of 10 and 64, we will now be able to make the vaccine we do have go further.”

In addition to pregnant women, children six months to under five years, front-line health care workers, those in remote and isolated communities and those under 65 with chronic health conditions, people in the following groups will be eligible to receive the H1N1 vaccine in B.C. beginning Monday:

- People 65 years of age and over with chronic health conditions.
- Healthy children from five years to 18 years inclusive.
- Health care workers delivering acute care, long term care, home care, and public health services.
- First responders.

“The number of people in these new eligible groups is significantly greater than the amount of vaccine we currently have in B.C. so not everyone will be able to get immunized in the next week,” said Kendall. “As access may vary slightly depending on health authority region, I encourage people to call ahead to their public health clinic or physician’s office to ensure the vaccine is available to them. We do expect that those who are now eligible and who want the vaccine will be able to get it over the next three weeks.”

In total, B.C. has received 1.16 million doses of pandemic H1N1 vaccine to date. An additional 258,000 doses are expected to arrive next week.

“To date, we have been able to vaccinate more than 900,000 British Columbians who are most at-risk or who would most benefit from being immunized,” said Minister of Healthy Living and Sport Ida Chong. “Despite unexpected delays in the manufacture of pandemic H1N1 influenza vaccine in Canada, the largest immunization campaign in B.C.’s history continues to roll out and we are optimistic that every British Columbian who needs and wants to be vaccinated will be able to do so before the end of this year.”

For more information on the H1N1 flu vaccine, visit [www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1](http://www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1). To find where you can get your H1N1 and/or seasonal flu shot, visit the Flu Clinic Locator at [www.ImmunizeBC.ca](http://www.ImmunizeBC.ca) or contact your local public health unit to confirm access in your community.

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## **What is pH1N1 influenza virus?**

The pandemic H1N1 (pH1N1) influenza virus (also known as human swine influenza or human swine flu) is a new type A influenza virus causing respiratory disease of humans. This particular strain has originated in swine, although it is now transmitted between people. Contact with swine is no longer a concern for catching this particular strain because it is now spread by people.

## **How does pH1N1 influenza virus spread?**

Spread of pH1N1 influenza virus from person to person occurs in the same way as seasonal flu. It is mainly spread person to person through coughing or sneezing by people infected with the influenza virus. People may become infected by touching something with flu viruses or germs on it and then touching their eyes, mouth or nose. Germs on hard surfaces, such as counters and doorknobs, can be picked up on hands and spread to the respiratory system in this way.

## **How can pH1N1 flu virus be prevented?**

You can reduce the spread of any influenza strain, including the pH1N1 flu virus, by taking standard precautionary measures:

- Wash your hands or clean them with alcohol-based hand rubs frequently, especially after you cough or sneeze, and before you eat.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a clean tissue when you cough or sneeze, and throw the tissue in the trash immediately after you use it.
- Cough and sneeze into your sleeve.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth, as infection can spread that way.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you get sick, stay at home and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

## **What are the symptoms of pH1N1 influenza?**

The symptoms of pH1N1 flu virus are similar to the symptoms of typical human seasonal influenza. Symptoms include high fever, cough, sore throat, headache, body aches, chills, fatigue, eye pain, shortness of breath, and lack of appetite. Some people with pH1N1 illness have also reported nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Symptoms or complications such as severe respiratory distress or pneumonia may develop in moderate or severe cases, as well as people with chronic health conditions.

## **What to do if you or your child has symptoms?**

If you or your child gets sick, you can take these steps to feel better:

- Children and adults who are sick should stay at home. Do not send children to school or daycare.
- Drink lots of fluids (juice, water, Pedialyte).
- Get plenty of rest.
- Keep your child comfortable.
- For fever, sore throat, and muscle aches, you can use fever-reducing medicines that your doctor recommends based on your child's age. Do not use aspirin with children or teenagers; it can cause Reye's syndrome, a life-threatening illness.
- Keep clean tissues and a trash bag close, and throw the tissue in the trash immediately after you use it.
- Wash your hands frequently.
- A person who is sick should recover in his or her own room as much as possible.
- If someone in your home is sick, keep the person away from those who are not sick.

You can visit [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca) or call 8-1-1 if you have symptoms or concerns, and speak to a nurse anytime of the day or night.

### **What is home isolation?**

You or your child may require home isolation if you have an infectious illness such as influenza. The pandemic influenza virus is contagious for 24 hours before symptoms start until about 7 days after symptoms start. People should stay home from school or work until they are feeling better and able to participate in normal activities.

Isolation means staying at home and not going to work, school, or other public places. While at home, the person who is sick should stay isolated. They should stay away from other household members and other people as much as possible.

Staying home prevents spreading influenza to others and it also gives you time to recover. You should recover in your own room as much as possible. Keep a 2 metre (6 feet) distance when contact with other household members is unavoidable. Everyone should wash their hands often using soap and warm water.

### **How can human infections with pH1N1 flu virus be diagnosed?**

Identification of pH1N1 influenza virus requires sending a specimen from the infected person to a laboratory for testing. However, your doctor may be able to diagnose influenza illness based on your symptoms and what is taking place in your community. In most cases, testing is not required. People with mild illness do not need to have a test done and should not go to their doctor for this. If you are unsure whether you need to see a doctor, call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1.

### **What medications are available to treat pH1N1 flu virus infections?**

Currently, antiviral drugs prescribed by doctors can be used for early treatment of the illness in certain people who may be at risk of more severe disease. This includes people with:

- conditions of the heart, lung, kidney or blood
- diabetes
- conditions or medication that reduce immunity
- pregnancy especially the third trimester or in the 4-6 weeks after delivery
- very obese people may also be at higher risk.

Ask your doctor if you have a condition that places you at higher risk. If you have a condition that puts you at higher risk for complications, consult your doctor early if you develop flu-like symptoms. Antiviral medication is most effective if given within 48 hours of symptom onset, and the sooner the better. Those with high risk conditions may wish to talk to their doctors about obtaining an antiviral prescription in advance.

Canada and B.C. have purchased an advance supply of antivirals and have committed to purchasing more if needed as part of an emergency public health response.

### **Is there a vaccine for pH1N1 flu virus?**

A pH1N1 pandemic vaccine is now available in Canada. The seasonal influenza vaccine is also available. Recommendations for seasonal influenza vaccine at its launch advised that those over 65 years old and residents of long term care facilities receive it as soon as possible. Now that the pandemic vaccine is available, those for whom both vaccines are recommended can receive these at the same visit. For more information see [HealthLink BC File #108b: Pandemic H1N1 \(pH1N1\) Influenza Vaccine](#).

### **When should I contact a doctor or health care provider?**

If you have symptoms or questions about pH1N1 you can call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 for health information, health education or symptom assessment, any time of the day or night.

If you need to see your doctor or health care provider, call ahead and report your symptoms so appropriate precautions can be taken.

Individuals with no flu symptoms can continue with their regular daily activities such as going to work or school. If they have travelled in another country or been in contact with someone who has travelled where pH1N1 flu virus (human swine flu) has been reported, they can still continue with their regular activities.

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit [www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm) or your local public health unit.

Click on [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca) or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call **7-1-1** in B.C.