



PUBLIC HEALTH

P.O. Box 1633
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www.region.waterloo.on.ca/ph

October 27, 2009

Dear Parent/Guardian

Update about pandemic H1N1 influenza virus in Waterloo Region

The influenza season has begun in Waterloo Region and we expect we will see an increase in the coming weeks in the number of persons who develop illness due to the pandemic H1N1 influenza virus. Some area schools are now beginning to report increased absentee rates among students who have become ill with symptoms of influenza.

Since last spring when this virus first appeared, we have learned a great deal about this strain of Influenza and how it will affect people and communities:

- This influenza virus acts just like our regular seasonal viruses that circulate in our communities every year. The main difference is that it causes more illnesses in a younger age group.
- The normal measures that we would use to manage our seasonal influenza (washing hands often with soap and water or using an alcohol based hand rub, covering coughs with tissues or your arm, staying home when ill and receiving influenza immunization when available) are the same measures that are recommended for this strain.
- For the majority of persons who will become ill with H1N1, the illness will be mild-to-moderate and self-limited (meaning that most people who are sick will not need to see a doctor or visit a hospital for treatment).
- Women who are pregnant, children under 5, and persons with chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart or lung disease, cancer, severe obesity, etc.) should call their doctor as soon as symptoms of influenza develop to discuss treatment with antiviral medications. Antiviral drugs may be prescribed to these persons and they need to be started within 48 hours of illness onset.

The symptoms of Influenza include the sudden or rapid onset of fever and a cough with at least one of the following symptoms as well: sore throat, joint pain, muscle pain, or extreme exhaustion. In some children, nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea may also be present.

Children who have these symptoms will need to stay home from school and all other extra-curricular activities in the community until at least 24 hours after their fever has disappeared and they are feeling well enough to take part in all activities. It is not unusual for a cough to continue for several days to weeks after a respiratory infection but as long as the fever and other symptoms are gone, a child can return to school and other activities.

More information about symptoms of H1N1 influenza and how to care for persons who are ill can be found on the Region of Waterloo Public Health Website at www.waterlooregionpandemic.ca. If you are concerned about your child's symptoms you should contact your family physician or Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 (or TTY 1-866-797-0007 for persons with hearing impairment) for further advice.



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Vaccine to protect against pandemic H1N1 influenza will become available in late October/early November through your physician's office or community immunization clinics. Children under the age of 10 years will need 2 doses of influenza vaccine at least 3 weeks apart to develop full immunity. Children under the age of 5 years or children of any age who have chronic medical conditions (for example, asthma, diabetes, heart or lung conditions, neuromuscular disorders or who are immune-compromised) are considered to be a high priority for receiving the vaccine as it first becomes available.

Schedules for community immunization clinics are being finalized and will be available on the Public Health Website at www.waterlooregionpandemic.ca or through our H1N1 general information line at 519-883-2289 (Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.)

As this influenza virus has remained a mild-to-moderate illness for the majority of persons who have become infected, school closures are not a recommended measure in this situation. School personnel have been working closely with Public Health to ensure that schools have implemented and enhanced their infection prevention and control efforts, including the provision of adequate washroom supplies for children and staff to properly wash their hands and increased attention to cleaning of commonly touched environmental surfaces.

You may also find additional information about pandemic H1N1 influenza on the Province of Ontario – Ministry of Health and Long Term care website at: www.ontario.ca/flu. The site contains information about the Provincial response to pandemic H1N1 and has basic information available in a number of languages.

We hope the information and websites provided will be helpful to you as we progress through our different influenza season this year.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Liana Nolan". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Dr. Liana Nolan
Commissioner/Medical Officer of Health
Region of Waterloo Public Health