



Winnipeg Regional Health Authority Office régional de la santé de Winnipeg
Caring for Health À l'écoute de notre santé

(Date)

Dear Parent or Guardian,

This letter provides you with important information on preventing the spread of influenza in your child's school.

Starting in September, Public Health Nurses from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) will be working closely with Winnipeg schools to monitor and help reduce the spread of H1N1 influenza. Nurses will be providing important information about how to prevent influenza, and they will be tracking the level of influenza-like illness in school children.

That is where you, as a parent, can play a key role. There are several important things that you can do to help stop the spread of influenza:

1. Please keep your child at home if he or she is sick, until he or she is better.
2. Encourage your child to wash his or her hands often, especially before eating, or after coughing or sneezing into their hands.
3. If your child has a cough, encourage him or her to cover his or her cough with a tissue, or to cough into his or her sleeve.
4. If your child is staying at home because of an illness, please contact the staff at your school to let them know why your child is absent, and tell the staff what symptoms your child is experiencing (symptoms of influenza include cough, fever, fatigue, muscle aches, sore throat, vomiting or diarrhea).

Thank you for helping to fight the spread of H1N1 influenza. The information you provide will help health authorities make important decisions about influenza prevention activities. We will update you as necessary if there are any significant changes to these recommendations.

For more information, please call your local community area public health office; the phone number for the Community Offices can be found on page 9 of the Winnipeg Health Services Directory (blue pages) in the middle of the Winnipeg MTS telephone book.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sande Harlos

H1N1 FLU: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR SCHOOLS AND PARENTS

What can we expect this flu season?

Flu viruses change over time. It is difficult to accurately predict what will happen. Although there have been cases of severe illness and death associated with this virus, most individuals with H1N1 in Manitoba have recovered without specific medical care or hospitalization.

It is expected that an H1N1 flu vaccine will be available for any Canadian who wants it later this fall and this could help to limit the spread and severity of illness. However, schools should also prepare for higher rates of employee and student absenteeism, and are encouraged to have their pandemic plans in place.

Will schools be closed?

H1N1 is considered to be present in all Manitoba communities and in all public settings. Health officials assess the situation on an ongoing basis to determine the most appropriate public health interventions to best protect the health of Manitobans.

Any decision to close a school or set of schools would involve careful consideration of the specific situation at that time, taking into account the spread and severity of the virus within Manitoba, as well as recommendations from the Public Health Agency of Canada, and other jurisdictions.

Direction on school closures for public health reasons would come from the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth, in consultation with the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer and/or regional medical officer of health.

Should parents/guardians have a child care plan?

Parents/guardians are encouraged to have a back-up plan for child care. When developing a plan, parents/guardians should consider:

- child care arrangements if your child is sick and unable to attend school;
- child care arrangements if you are sick and require support after school-hours, including a designated person(s) to pick up children should you be unavailable.

Will the H1N1 flu vaccine be available in schools?

The H1N1 vaccine is expected to be ready this fall and there will be enough supply for every Manitoban who wishes to be vaccinated. The vaccine may arrive in batches, so health officials will identify people who should be prioritized for the vaccine, either because of their essential role during flu season or because they are considered to be at greater risk for severe illness.

In order to best meet the needs of the community, how and where the H1N1 flu vaccine will be provided to people who wish to be vaccinated will likely be determined at a regional level.

What precautions should I take?

Manitobans are encouraged to use routine precautionary measures to prevent infections:

- Stay home from school or work if you are ill and limit unnecessary contact with others.
- Cover a cough or sneeze by coughing or sneezing into your elbow or sleeve or using a tissue to cover your nose and mouth. Place the tissue in the garbage.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. When soap and water are unavailable, hand sanitizers may be an acceptable alternative if hands are not visibly soiled.
- Limit touching of your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Contact your health-care provider or call Health Links-Info Santé at **788-8200** or **1-888-315-9257** if you are concerned that you may need advice or care.
- Obtain prompt care if your symptoms are severe or worsening (i.e. shortness of breath, dehydration, worsening fever, cough or weakness).

Should I be wearing a mask?

Manitoba Health and Healthy Living and the Public Health Agency of Canada do not recommend that healthy people wear masks as they go about their daily routines, including going to school or work. There is no evidence that wearing a mask will prevent the spread of infection in the general population.

What about children?

Children should take the same precautions as adults, including washing their hands regularly and covering their nose and mouth when coughing. Young children may need help with hand washing. Children with flu-like symptoms should stay home from school or child care. To reduce the spread of germs, keep surfaces clean in areas where children play. If you have questions or are concerned that your child may need care, contact your health care provider or Health Links-Info Santé at **788-8200** or **1-888-315-9257**.

What should I do if there is a confirmed case in my child's school?

The H1N1 virus is considered to be present in communities throughout Manitoba and in all public settings. Children who are feeling well can continue with regular activities such as attending school.

The same basic precautions are still the best defense against H1N1, including washing your hands regularly with soap and water and covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. Children who are ill should stay home until they feel better. Parents of ill children can contact Health Links-Info Santé at **788-8200** or **1-888-315-9257** for advice on when to seek medical attention.

Where can I get more information?

For additional information on H1N1 flu, please visit: www.manitoba.ca/flu or contact your local public health nurse. For more information on how to care for someone with the flu please see the fact sheet *Self Care and Influenza* or contact Health Links-Info Santé at **788-8200** or **1-888-315-9257** (toll-free).