

H1N1 Facts – Q&A

1. How long does the virus live outside the body?

A: It has not been confirmed how long this strain of flu can live outside the body (e.g. on doorknobs, telephones and keyboards). However, many flu strains can survive up to 8 hours on most surfaces.

2. How do I care for an ill person at home?

A: Separate the ill person from others, keeping the person at least 1 - 2 metres in distance from others. Cover your mouth and nose with a surgical mask when caring for the ill person and wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly after each contact. Improve the air flow in the ill person's room; use doors and windows to take advantage of breezes. Keep the environment clean with readily available household cleaning agents.

3. When can an employee ill with influenza-like illness come back to work?

Employees should not come to work if they are experiencing flu-like symptoms, including fever, cough, headache, muscle and joint pain, sore throat and runny nose, and sometimes vomiting or diarrhea. Employees should not go back to work until 24 hours after symptoms have resolved or 7 days after first experiencing the symptoms (whichever is longer).

4. What are the current treatment guidelines for H1N1 Flu Virus?

The most up-to-date information can be found in the Important Health Notices (IHNs) on the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care website (<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/emu/ihn.html>).

5. Is an effective vaccine already available against the new H1N1 Flu Virus?

No, but work is already under way to develop such a vaccine. Influenza vaccines generally contain a dead or weakened form of a circulating virus. The vaccine prepares the body's immune system to defend against a true infection. For the vaccine to protect as well as possible, the virus in it should match the circulating "wild-type" virus relatively closely. Since this H1N1 virus is new, there is no vaccine currently available made with this particular virus. Making a completely new influenza vaccine can take five to six months.

6. Will currently available seasonal vaccine confer protection against H1N1 Flu Virus?

The best scientific evidence available today is incomplete but suggests that seasonal vaccines will confer little or no protection against H1N1 Flu Virus.

7. How quickly can H1N1 Flu Virus vaccines be available?

A: The first doses of H1N1 Flu Virus vaccine could be available five to six months from identification of the pandemic strain (i.e., Fall 2009). The regulatory approval will be conducted in parallel with the manufacturing process. Regulatory authorities have put into place expedited processes that do not compromise on the quality and safety of the vaccine. Delays in production could result from poor growth of the virus strain used to make the vaccine.

8. Where can I find more information?

A: More information can be found from the following sources:

- The Pandemic/Emergency Planning section of the OPA website.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) website at www.who.int.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada website at www.publichealth.gc.ca.
- Seasonal flu handouts can be used to provide patients written information and the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care is currently developing new handouts for their website.