

Frequently Asked Questions: H1N1 and Schools

Niagara Region Medical Officer, Dr. Robin Williams, declared a community-wide H1N1 outbreak for the Niagara region on Friday, October 30, 2009. This means H1N1 is circulating across Niagara in increasing numbers. It is important to understand that children and youth are as likely to come into contact with the H1N1 flu virus at the grocery store, shopping mall, arena, or church as he or she is from attending school.

Can I find out my school's absenteeism rate?

School absenteeism rates are only one of many different sources of information to understand the amount of H1N1 flu in the Niagara region. Sources of flu information also include laboratory-confirmed cases, visits to doctors for symptoms of the flu, ambulance off-load delays, emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and now attendance at flu assessment centres. **It is important to understand that you or your child are as likely to come into contact with the virus at the grocery store, shopping mall, arena, or church as your child is from attending school so preventive measures are important regardless of the number of absent students from a particular school.** Also, the school absenteeism rate does not necessarily reflect how many children and youth are ill with H1N1. Flu tracking information is available on www.niagararegion.ca under H1N1.

Will schools be closed as a result of the community outbreak or other gathering places to reduce the spread of the virus?

No. The Public Health Agency of Canada continues to recommend against the widespread closure of schools. This measure may not be effective in preventing the spread of H1N1, and the benefits of keeping schools open currently outweigh the risk of spread.

Decisions about school closures are made by the school boards and under certain circumstances, this may be advisable. The Medical Officer of Health is providing the school boards with up to date information and is advising them of the best action to take.

At this time school closures will not occur for this virus, just as schools would not close for seasonal influenza.

How will I be notified if the school will be closing?

The same process is used as with any school closure, such as in bad weather. You will need to refer to your particular school process.

What can our school community do to stop the spread of the H1N1 flu?

Vaccination is the number one preventive measure. Everyone can prevent and reduce the spread of H1N1:

- Clean hands regularly
- Cough into your elbow, arm/sleeve or tissue
- Clean toys, objects, and surfaces (door knobs, hand rails, desktops, light switches and water fountains) more often.
- Practice personal space of two metres if someone in your household is ill
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth to spread germs
- Stay home if you're ill

Students are also discouraged from sharing food, drinks, and supplies with others.

What should students, staff, and volunteers do if they become ill?

Adults and children with flu-like symptoms should stay home from work and school. If you or your child is experiencing fever and cough and any of the following: sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, headache or body aches, here are some options:

- Go to the Niagara Region website to complete the [Influenza Self-Assessment Tool](#) or call 1-866-797-0007 to complete the assessment by phone.
- If the self-assessment tool indicates “yes” for probable influenza, call your doctor or Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 for a more thorough assessment.
- If your doctor cannot see you, go to a flu assessment centre or walk-in clinic.
- Staff, students, and volunteers that are ill with flu-like symptoms should stay home and not return to work/school until the fever is gone for 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medication, and until you are feeling well and are able to fully participate in all normal day-to-day activities.
- Family members do not need to stay at home unless they have flu-like symptoms.

How should I take care of my sick child at home?

Make sure your child/youth has lots of rest and drink plenty of fluids. Treat fever by wearing lightweight clothing and keep the room temperature around 20°C (68°F). Fever reducing medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®), ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) can be used. Decrease contact with other family members and do not go out in public while feeling ill. Wash hands often and have child cough into their sleeve. Household members who are at risk of complications should be assessed by a physician at the first sign of symptoms.

What is a Flu Assessment Centre?

These centres will:

- Assess you for influenza
- Prescribe and/or dispense antiviral drugs and other treatments, if required
- Give you information about H1N1 and how to ease symptoms
- Refer you for care, if required
- The H1N1 vaccination is NOT available at flu assessment centres

Where are flu assessment centres located in Niagara? (as of November 3, 2009)

Location	Hours	Contact
St. Catharines Niagara Health System, 155 Ontario Street (former Hotel Dieu Emergency Department)	Monday – Friday 2 p.m. – 8 p.m. Saturday and Sunday Noon – 6 p.m.	905-378-4647 press “0” for switchboard
Grimsby West Lincoln Memorial Hospital 169 Main St. East	Monday – Friday 4 p.m. – 9 p.m. Saturday and Sunday 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.	905-945-2253

How long is a person contagious with H1N1?

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning one day before the onset of symptoms and continues for approximately 7 days after symptoms have started and possibly up to 10 days for children and people who are very ill.

When should I take my child/youth to a hospital?

It is important not to over-burden the already busy emergency departments if you or your child is experiencing mild flu-like symptoms.

If you or your child has new or worsening symptoms, go to the nearest emergency room or call 911. These symptoms may include:

- Difficulty breathing / shortness of breath when resting or doing very little
- Blue lips, cold feet, toes, and/or hands, pale
- Extreme lack of energy, limp or unconscious
- Continuous vomiting or severe diarrhea. Dry mouth, dry tongue, decreased urination (no urine in the past 6-8 hours) or very yellow/orange urine
- Stiff neck, sensitive to light
- Seizures
- Confusion or disorientation

What should I do if I am pregnant and I work or attend a K-Grade 12 school?

Pregnant women working in or attending schools should follow the same preventive measures as the general public. Pregnant women are at a higher risk of complications from the flu and should speak with their health care provider as soon as possible if they develop flu-like symptoms.

For more information on the H1N1 flu virus and H1N1 clinic schedule, visit www.niagararegion.ca, or call the H1N1 Information Line Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. at 905-688-8248 or 1-888-505-6074 ext. 7950. Residents can subscribe to the H1N1 website page to receive an email alert when new information is uploaded.