

Novel H1N1 Influenza A Situation Update

SIMCOE MUSKOKA DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT

August 12, 2009

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The health unit will provide regular novel H1N1 influenza A updates, at a minimum of every two weeks beginning in September, as a means to support your information needs, planning, communications & access to resources.

The updates will be based on the best available information at the time, acknowledging that the novel nature of the H1N1 influenza A virus means it will continue to be monitored closely (locally, provincially, nationally and world wide) and analyzed to ensure that recommendations and actions are based on the best available knowledge.

We will also continue to work with and communicate to partners through regular channels where they exist to support ongoing planning and updates. If you have questions please contact your regular liaison contact or call *Your Health Connection* at 721-7520 or 1 877-721-7520.

Sincerely,
Dr. Charles Gardner
Medical Officer of Health

Current Situation

World - There are currently over 120 countries with confirmed cases of novel H1N1 influenza A infection. The southern hemisphere's regular influenza season has begun and countries there are reporting that the novel H1N1 influenza A virus is spreading and causing illness along with regular seasonal influenza viruses. However, the spread and severity of the novel virus is at lower levels than has been observed in previous influenza pandemics.

Canada/Ontario - Cases of novel H1N1 influenza A have been reported in every province and territory. The vast majority of cases of the illness have been mild; however, a relatively small proportion of reported cases have required hospitalization and an even smaller number have died. In Ontario hospitalization and mortality associated with the novel virus have been low with about two hospital admissions for every 100,000 residents and less than two deaths per 1,000,000 residents.

The majority of deaths and hospitalized associated with the novel virus have had one or more underlying medical conditions.

Simcoe Muskoka - A relatively small number of cases of novel H1N1 influenza A have been reported to the health unit and most have been mild in nature, with only a few requiring hospitalization. No deaths associated with the novel virus have been reported in Simcoe Muskoka to date.

The typical influenza season in Ontario runs from October to April; however, flu activity this year has persisted into the summer months with higher than expected levels of influenza-like illness

(ILI) reported in the community. There have also been outbreaks of novel H1N1 influenza A at several overnight recreational summer camps including a number located in Simcoe Muskoka. All the same, influenza activity does appear to be on the decline, with the proportion of influenza positive laboratory tests steadily decreasing over the past six weeks and no new recent camp outbreaks reported.

There may be an intensified fall-winter flu season with novel H1N1 influenza A, co-circulating with the other usual seasonal influenza A and B strains.

Surveillance

SMDHU continues to monitor for influenza-like illness through local reports to public health from primary care settings (hospitals, physician offices), long term care facilities, day cares, recreational camps and correctional facilities.

The H1N1 Response Team at the health unit is monitoring the novel H1N1 influenza A situation in Canada and around the world for new information and updates through key websites, and through participation in Ontario Ministry of Health teleconferences and meetings.

Public Health Measures

The key message for everyone at this time is to follow the same personal protection measures advised during any flu season:

- Wash your hands frequently and well; or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap & water is not available
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or into your sleeve
- Clean shared surfaces
- Stay at home if you are sick
- Get your flu shot

The health unit is preparing a fall campaign with media, print and web-based materials to promote these key messages. The local campaign will augment the public communications strategies planned by the Ontario Ministry of Health and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Vaccine

Seasonal Influenza Vaccine

We expect to receive 50 per cent of our allotment by October 1st. Primary care offices should begin receiving their seasonal vaccine by early October.

The remainder of our supply should arrive shortly thereafter and we anticipate that our public flu clinics will begin mid October.

The Ministry of Health and SMDHU will promote seasonal flu vaccination through the media and through materials available to workplaces. A key message will be stressing the importance of seasonal flu vaccination this year with the potential of it co-circulating with H1N1.

H1N1 Vaccine

The federal government announced that it will order enough novel H1N1 influenza A vaccine to ensure that persons who are recommended to have the vaccine will receive it. Production is starting at this time and it will likely be available sometime in November.

Discussions on who will be recommended to have the vaccine are currently underway by the experts at the federal and provincial level. Because the supply is likely to be limited initially due to production capacity, the experts will also provide a list of priority groups for receiving the vaccine. The H1N1 flu season in the southern hemisphere is being monitored closely and this experience will inform these decisions. We do not expect to have confirmation of the priority groups until September.

Details NOT yet known:

- the number of doses and the interval between doses that will be required for protection
- the vaccine effectiveness
- whether novel H1N1 influenza A vaccine can be given at the same time as a seasonal influenza vaccine
- whether public health will be responsible for all administration of the vaccine or if it will also be distributed through primary care settings.

SMDHU is currently planning for H1N1 vaccination clinics late in the year, including public education and awareness. The Ministry of Health will also promote novel H1N1 influenza A vaccination and will prepare the necessary information for primary care offices to support patient education and determination of priority.

Antivirals

Treatment with antivirals is currently only recommended for the following groups:

- Influenza-like illness (ILI) in people at risk of complications
- ILI in people with complications requiring hospitalization

Antivirals must be taken within 48 hours after the onset of symptoms of influenza to be most effective.

The most recent information indicates that the novel H1N1 influenza A virus causes illness and complications similar to those of seasonal influenza. Access to antivirals in the community for novel H1N1 influenza A is the same as during the regular flu season, through primary care settings (i.e., physician offices, walk-in clinics and through hospitals if emergency care is required).

Should this system become overwhelmed, then other provisions for rapid access are under discussion at the ministry level.

Flu Assessment Centres

Locally plans for designated flu assessment centres are under development with a number of local partners. A Simcoe Muskoka plan will be prepared in case the primary care system is overwhelmed and additional system support is required.

Next Steps

Pandemic Planning will continue over the course of the summer and the early fall months as we monitor the world and local situations and information from the federal and provincial leads becomes available.

We will continue to work closely with our partners and plan for situations that are specific to your particular population group.

