

## **H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) – Seasonal Agricultural Workers**

### **Key Messages**

- All foreign workers who come to Ontario under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers program ARE covered by OHIP from the minute they arrive in Ontario.
- Our government understands the vital contribution workers from the federal Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) make to the success of Ontario's farms and farmers.
- We have been further assured by the Mexican government that medical screening of all workers has been enhanced, prior to their departure from Mexico.
- Canadian Border Services Agency staff also screen foreign workers at border crossings and airports, to ensure they meet admissibility requirements before allowing them to enter the country. In addition, Quarantine Officers are at every Canadian airport receiving direct flights from Mexico. This increased capacity will enable individual assessment of any ill passengers.
- We remind all farmers to be vigilant about the health of their workers and seek medical advice should any symptoms be noticed.
- Questions about the SAWP program should be directed to Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

### **Questions and Answers:**

**Q1. How many seasonal workers come to Ontario every year? Where, for the most part, do they go?**

A1. Each year, approximately eight to 10 thousand workers come to Ontario from Mexico, mostly to work in horticultural and greenhouse farms, with some in the tender fruit area. The total number of vacancies filled by FARMS through SAWP last year was 17,924, down about 1 per cent from 2007. In 2008, Ontario farmers employed 8,475 workers from Mexico up from 8,211 in 2007. Last year, a total of 1400 employers participated in the program (this is a decline from previous years).

Questions about this program should be directed to Citizenship and Immigration Canada at (613) 952-1650.

**Q2. What impact would it have on the agriculture sector if these workers did not come to Ontario?**

A2. Seasonal agricultural workers make a vital contribution to the province's agricultural sector; from planting through to harvesting, Ontario farmers depend on these workers to get the job done.

We have been assured by federal and Mexican authorities that precautions to prevent the spread of influenza have been implemented. Those actions will not prevent Mexico's seasonal workers from coming to Canada.

There are no travel restrictions at this time. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, which runs the seasonal worker program, these workers must always undergo a physical exam before travelling to Canada, and will now have that exam include having their temperature taken by two doctors.

**Q3. What is being done to ensure the seasonal workers who enter Canada are healthy?**

A3. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, which runs the seasonal worker program, these workers must always undergo a physical exam before travelling to Canada, and will now have that exam include having their temperature taken by two doctors.

If farm operators, workers or any person has questions regarding their personal health, they should contact their physician or local Public Health Unit.

**Q4. How can we be sure that food products handled by seasonal workers who may have been exposed to this virus are safe to eat?**

A4. It is important to remember that the influenza virus is not spread by food, but basic food handling practices should not be overlooked. Fresh produce should be washed before being eaten or cooked.

Frequent, proper hand washing is one important way to reduce the risk of illness and to avoid the spread of viruses from one person to another. (Wash hands with warm water and soap for a full 20 seconds.)

We have been assured by the federal and Mexican governments that medical screening of all workers has been enhanced to ensure that all agricultural employees leaving Mexico do not have influenza.

Canadian Border Services Agency staff also screen foreign workers at border crossings and airports, to ensure they meet admissibility requirements before allowing them to enter the country. In addition, Quarantine Officers are at every Canadian airport receiving direct flights from Mexico. This increased capacity will enable in-person assessment of any ill passengers.

**Q5. With unemployment skyrocketing, why use seasonal workers at all? Why not offer the jobs to Ontario residents?**

A5. The Agricultural Workers Program operates on a Canadian First basis and only when the employers are unsuccessful in their attempts to hire domestic seasonal labour can they apply to meet their seasonal labour needs through this program.