

MCFD Update on H1N1 Influenza Virus

May 1, 2009

On behalf of Mark Sieben, Chief Operating Officer.

As you are aware, media reports have been circulating regarding cases of H1N1 influenza (human swine flu) in Mexico, the United States and more recently in parts of Canada including British Columbia.

The World Health Organization has expressed concern about the more than 1,400 cases of severe influenza-like illness that have recently occurred in Mexico and have resulted in over 100 deaths. This flu-like illness has so far affected persons of all ages, including healthy young adults. Affected individuals typically show symptoms of fever and cough that may progress to severe respiratory distress within five days. The symptoms of H1N1 influenza in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza infection and include fever, cough, fatigue, sore throat and lack of appetite. Some people with the H1N1 virus have also reported vomiting and diarrhoea, though these symptoms may also commonly occur, unrelated to influenza, with travel to countries such as Mexico.

Situation in Canada and the US

Canada has experienced a small but increasing number of confirmed cases of H1N1 influenza with at least 28 cases throughout the country including 11 people testing positive in BC (see BC information below). Canadian authorities have issued a travel advisory recommending avoidance of non-essential travel to Mexico. Though not all details are available at this time, it appears that most of the Canadian cases involve travellers returning from Mexico. The US case count has risen to 109, including one infant death.

Situation in BC

As of today, eleven cases of H1N1 influenza have been confirmed in BC, 5 of which are related to recent travel to Mexico.

Canadian health officials have issued an advisory to health authorities to be on the lookout for travellers from Mexico and parts of the US who develop flu-like symptoms (though not all current cases have occurred among travellers). Any person who is experiencing the following symptoms should contact a physician. Such persons should ensure their physician is aware of their recent travel history, if any.

Symptoms include:

1. fever
2. cough
3. sore throat
4. eye pain
5. shortness of breath
6. muscle and joint pain
7. extreme fatigue

General Precautions for All Ministry and Delegated Agency Staff and Foster Parents:
Influenza and other respiratory infections are transmitted from person to person via the respiratory route. Coughs and sneezes release germs into the air where they can be breathed in by

others. Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system when someone touches their mouth and/or nose.

Individuals who have recently travelled to the US or Mexico are encouraged to be particularly vigilant with regard to flu-like symptoms and consult with their family physician if these arise.

Here are some everyday actions people can take to stay healthy:

- Cough into the bend in your elbow or cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of all tissues immediately after use.

- 1 Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand disinfectants are also effective.

- 2 Use alcohol-based disinfectant wipes to clean surface areas frequently used by others, such as keyboards, phones, door knobs, etc.

- 3 Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. This is a major cause of transmission of viruses and bacteria.

Try to avoid close contact with sick people:

- Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing by infected people.

- 1 If you get sick, it is recommended that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them for the seven-day period.

- 2 If your symptoms become worse, contact a health care provider regarding your symptoms.

- 3 Any person who must be in close proximity with an affected individual (a distance of 2 meters or less) should wear a surgical mask.

Instructions regarding vulnerable children and youth:

Any child or youth who appears overtly ill or has an obvious cough should be brought to the attention of a health care provider immediately for rapid assessment and attention. Parents or adults that exhibit symptoms should be encouraged to seek medical advice. If necessary, visits and meetings should be rescheduled or moved to locations where there is less risk of exposure to a harmful virus.

For foster parents and staff of residential and treatment resources and/or custody centres: regular and thorough cleaning is absolutely critical. The use of alcohol-based disinfectant wipes to clean surface areas frequently used by others, such as keyboards, phones, door knobs, touch pads, etc. is an effective means of minimizing the spread of germs.

Resource workers must be advised if a child in care, foster parents, or members of foster families are diagnosed with H1N1 influenza.

The use of a surgical mask may also be effective in reducing the potential spread of germs.

In residential and treatment resources and/or custody centres with cleaning staff: cleaning staff will also need to be vigilant and thorough in their cleaning and the resource or centre management should implement a quality control process to ensure that the cleaning is adequate and in accordance with established standards. Surfaces should be wiped thoroughly using alcohol-based disinfectant and left wet (to air dry) in order to ensure sufficient exposure to the cleaning agent and adequate virus and bacteria kill rates.

More information is available by calling HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 (accessible 24 hours every day), or

- o for MCFD employees at the following intranet link
<https://gww.gov.bc.ca/Stories/2009/0427/swineflu.aspx>
- o For non MCFD employees at the following internet link
http://www.gov.bc.ca/govt/swine_flu.html

The Public Health Agency of Canada has the following internet link http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine_200904-eng.php

Travel

Canadians have been advised to avoid unnecessary travel to Mexico. Foster parents are requested to heed this advisory. If a Mexico trip by a foster parent is necessary, the resource worker must be advised. Foster parents are reminded that any trips outside Canada for a child in care have to be approved in advance by the child's social worker. Child in care travel to Mexico will not be approved at this time.