

H1N1: Are you ready? Seminar Report

H1N1 is considered to be a pandemic because of the vast number of people that may get the virus. Not all people will be sick at once but there is believed to be a chance that there will be about 15 to 35% absenteeism on top of the normal that would be absent every day. We need to make sure that all of our essential services can be covered if there is an outbreak in our work place. Make sure that more than one person can do all jobs that are considered to be critical for survival of the company.

It is believed that the H1N1 outbreak will come in 3 waves of 6 to 8 weeks each. It is believed that we are about to enter the second wave of the pandemic. The first wave started in March 2009.

Signs of H1N1:

- Similar symptoms to seasonal influenza, except:
 - There is a rapid onset of respiratory illness
 - Fever & Cough – Most prominent symptom
 - Sore throat, fatigue, headache, severe muscle & joint pain
 - May have a shortness of breath and difficulty waking up.
 - Tends to be either a very mild or very severe illness – there currently seems to be no medium

They believe that a person will know that they have H1N1 from the rapidness and severity of the symptoms. For severe cases, most likely a person will be in bed unable to move for about 3 days and then you should start to see improvements. They are asking that you don't go to the doctor's office to get diagnosed because that will further spread the disease to others. In fact I believe they have now stopped testing for the virus.

At first they were asking anyone with H1N1 to stay home for 7 days but now they are saying that 3-4 days should be sufficient if you are symptom free and able to work. People with Diabetes and Asthma may need to be off longer because their illness may be more severe.

One important thing to note is that the H1N1 is a virus that a person can only catch ONCE!

Transmission of the virus occurs through contact with an infected surface. The virus can rest on any surface through droplets dispersed by coughing, sneezing, or handling objects with infected hands. You cannot catch the virus simply by shaking someone's hand. You should always avoid touching your hands to your mouth unless they have been freshly cleaned.

There are 3 main ways to protect yourself:

- **Eliminate** the agent on surfaces through cleaning and disinfection.
 - Surfaces such as telephones and keyboards should be cleaned with disinfecting wipes at least once a day especially if other people besides you are using it.
 - Common areas of a building (such as door handles and light switches) should be cleaned often.
 - It is believed that the virus can stay on a surface for more than 24 hours so frequent cleaning is the best prevention.
- **Stop transmission** of the virus through good hand hygiene and keeping a healthy distance from people whenever possible.
 - Thoroughly wash your hands often especially before eating or after contact with other people. Soap and water is always the most effective but if you don't have access to that then use a hand sanitizer. The hand sanitizer has to be 60 – 90% alcohol based in order to be effective.

- **Reduce host susceptibility** through vaccinations and improving your immune system.

It is suggested that everyone in Canada get the vaccination which will be available through public health clinics within the next few weeks.

The best way to improve your immune system is through good nutrition and increased exercise. This will help you to build up your defences against the virus and should help the symptoms to not be as severe if you do catch it.

The basic way to prevent the spread of the virus is to remember and follow the 3 C's which most of us have all seen posted in clinics and hospitals. They are

- Clean
 - Constant hand washing
- Cover
 - Cover your cough or sneeze with your sleeve or with a tissue
- Contain
 - Stay home if you are feeling ill

Possible side effects from the vaccination:

- Sore arm for a day or two
- Mild fever

H1N1 treatment plans (much the same as with a seasonal flu)

- For fever – Tylenol or non ASA drugs
- Drink plenty of fluids – suggested hot fluids are the best for you

- Anti-viral medications may be needed for more severe illnesses
- Best prevention is to have the vaccine
- Treat the same as any other flu with lots of rest
- There is no need for the general public to wear masks unless you are in direct contact with a person that you know has the virus

A suggested website to obtain additional information is www.fightflu.ca