

May 29, 2009

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Re: Novel H1N1 flu virus in schools

Ottawa Public Health is working closely with the schools and school boards in the city of Ottawa to monitor and manage the presence of the novel H1N1 flu virus. As is the case in other areas of North America, the number of individuals who have tested positive for this virus in our community continues to increase, and these individuals tend to be younger than those affected by seasonal influenza. Our surveillance information shows that half of the individuals who have confirmed novel H1N1 flu in the city of Ottawa are younger than 16. We are aware of cases in several schools across the city.

As part of ongoing enhanced surveillance measures for the novel H1N1 flu virus, Ottawa Public Health had earlier requested that schools, nursing homes and other institutions report absenteeism rates in excess of 10 per cent. Some schools in the city have recently reported unusual patterns of absenteeism, which we are actively following and managing. These reports have been tremendously helpful in preventing and managing outbreaks of infectious diseases in our community in the past.

Parents and guardians also have a role to play in limiting the spread of the virus in the community. Please ensure that family members **stay home when they experience flu-like symptoms** such as a fever over 38 C/100.4 F, a cough, feeling short of breath, muscle aches, fatigue, severe headache, sore throat, and lack of appetite. When your children show flu-like symptoms, they should stay away from school, childcare facilities, sports, extracurricular activities, shopping centres, church, visits to friends and other activities where they might come in contact with others.

Some of the children who have confirmed novel H1N1 flu to date have experienced severe symptoms. **If your children experience symptoms such as high fever and intense difficulty breathing, please make sure they are seen by a health care provider or go to a hospital.** With milder symptoms, care of your children at home should include limiting contact with other household members, teaching them to cough and sneeze into their sleeve instead of their hands, ensuring they wash their hands frequently, giving them plenty of fluids and making sure they get adequate rest. Your children may resume their regular activities when they no longer have a fever and are feeling better. The presence of a cough alone, in the absence of other symptoms, is not a reason to stay away from school. It is not unusual for individuals to experience a cough for days to weeks beyond the period of infection.

For more information about the novel H1N1 flu in Ottawa, please visit ottawa.ca/health or call the Ottawa Public Health Information Line at 613-580-6744 to speak to a public health nurse.

Sincerely,

Dr. Isra Levy
Medical Officer of Health

