



# SAFE WORK



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## H1N1 Flu Facts

Information for employers and workers in business, government and other non-healthcare settings

### How is the virus transmitted?

The pandemic H1N1 influenza virus is spread exactly like any other seasonal flu – from one person to another by coughing or sneezing, by hand-to-hand contact with an infected person, or after handling objects contaminated by infected people.

H1N1 can be spread anywhere people gather – at home, in the community, or at the workplace. For most people, the risk of being infected at work is no greater than in any other place where people gather.

### What are the symptoms of the flu?

The symptoms of influenza-like illness include fever over 38°C, cough and any one or more of these symptoms:

- sore throat;
- joint/muscle aches; or
- weakness/severe fatigue.

Children may also feel sick to their stomach, vomit or have diarrhea. Fever may not be prominent in patients under five or 65 and older.

In some cases, people who have influenza will not experience these symptoms. However, they can still spread it to others, especially if they cough or sneeze. It's important for all people to practice proper cough and sneeze etiquette, whether or not they feel ill.

### Routine measures to prevent spread of infection

To help prevent the spread of the flu, employers should inform their workers of these measures and ensure they are followed.

#### *Hand Hygiene*

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water. When soap and water are unavailable, hand sanitizer may be an acceptable alternative if hands are not visibly soiled.
- Limit touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

#### *Cough Etiquette*

- Always cough into your sleeve or a tissue, rather than into your hands or air.
- Make sure to wash your hands afterwards.

#### *Distancing*

- Although the risk of becoming infected with H1N1 in the workplace is considered to be no different than any other location where people gather, putting greater distance between yourself and other people and avoiding close contact may decrease your risk of exposure.

#### *Staying at home when ill*

- To help prevent spread of the flu, workers with flu symptoms should stay home from work and limit contact with others while they are ill.

(see over)

#### Workplace Safety and Health Division Contact Information:

Winnipeg: (204) 945-3446  
Toll-Free: 1-866-888-8186 (Manitoba only)  
24-Hour Emergency Line: (204) 945-0581

Publications/resources available at: [www.safemanitoba.com](http://www.safemanitoba.com)



***Use of Surgical Masks***

Public health officials do not recommend healthy people wear surgical masks as they go about their daily routines. This is because wearing masks in non-health care settings is not effective to prevent the spread of influenza in most settings and circumstances. In fact, improper use of masks may actually increase the risk of infection, as removing it incorrectly can spread the virus to hands and face.

**Precautions for interacting with clients during influenza season**

Employees that work directly with members of the public are generally not considered to be at any higher risk of being infected with the flu. However, there are a number of precautionary measures that workplaces can take to help protect their workers.

Clients with flu symptoms should be advised to reschedule their appointment if possible, or receive service through another method not involving face-to-face contact with a worker, such as telephone or online service provision. There are numerous ways this can be achieved, such as by posting signs at entranceways. Hand sanitizer can also be provided for client use.

**Additional information for some workplaces**

Manitoba Health and Healthy Living has developed guidelines for some workplaces outlining procedures and practices to be followed, including the use of personal protective equipment. These are available at: [www.gov.mb.ca/flu/business.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/flu/business.html)

**Right - to - refuse situations**

Employers have the responsibility to take reasonable measures to protect the health and safety of workers in their workplace. In the context of pandemic H1N1, this means employers are expected to develop and implement policies and procedures to reduce the spread of the virus that are consistent with guidelines outlined by public health, including hand washing, proper cough etiquette and staying at home if sick.

Workplace Safety and Health legislation gives all workers the right to refuse hazardous work and have an issue investigated by the employer. Workers concerned about contracting the disease at work should:

- Ask their employer for information on the policies in place at their workplace.
- Access the information on H1N1 from the Manitoba Health and Safe Manitoba websites or contact Health Links – Info Santé at 788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257 (toll-free) or Workplace Safety and Health at 945-6848.

**Who should I contact for more information?**

For further information about pandemic H1N1 flu, please visit the flu website at: [www.manitoba.ca](http://www.manitoba.ca)

For a listing of public health offices, visit: [www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html)